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Australian farmers abandoning farms after six years of drought

Harry der Nederlanden

Australia's farmers are suffering the sixth year of drought in a row. Some areas have seen no rain even longer. With no hope of relief in sight, the Australian government has created a $1.1 billion package for drought aid, part of it is to pay farmers to leave their farms in arid regions. About one-third of the country's farmland has been affected. Debt-ridden farmers who accept the offer will receive $150,000 to abandon farms that are no longer viable. The lingering drought has sunk many farmers deep in debt and some have been driven to suicide.

Farmers are beginning to ask whether the outback, a large region of low rainfall which has supported previous generations, will continue to produce crops in the future. Although droughts of this length have occurred before in eastern Australia, this one has been very severe. Meteorologists say that although the drought was not caused by global warming, it probably made it worse.

Encouraged by spring rains and by better weather forecasts, many farmers borrowed to plant crops this spring and already sold some of what they hoped would be a bumper crop. But the rains didn't come and neither did the crops, plunging them further in debt. This at a time when wheat prices are soaring, so that one good crop could have lifted a farmer out of debt.

In 1962 farming provided 10.3 percent of jobs in Australia. Today it employs just over 3 percent of the labor force. In the same time period, the agricultural exports have dropped from 64 percent to 14 percent of total exports. Once accounting for 12 percent of Australia's economy, they now account for 2 percent.

The rescue package has raised much controversy. Why should farmers who can't make the grade get a bail-out package when urban businesses that fail must fend for themselves, many city folk are asking. Many of the farms that are failing tend to be smaller enterprises and those who are still farming them are ageing, as the young people have migrated to the cities; no young farmers are lining up to take their place. Farmers, stung by the accusation that they are getting welfare, point out that after six years of drought only 13 percent of farmers have received any sort of drought assistance.

Environmentalists have also piled on the farmers. They argue that some areas of the country should never have been farmed in the first place. The land should be allowed to return to its wild state. They also point out that the farm sector consumes between 60 and 70 percent of human water use in Australia while producing only 2.5 percent of GDP. It also produces 17 percent of Australia's greenhouse gas, they argue, more than what's produced by cars.

Some of the critics make it sound as if the farm sector is more of a burden than a benefit to the nation. Others point out that Australians still have to eat and that rising wheat prices are pushing up the price of other foods as well.

Australia has always been a very dry continent, getting less rainfall than any other continent except Antarctica. And it catches only a small percent of the run-off in rivers and lakes – just 12 percent as compared to 38 percent in Africa and 48 percent in Asia.

Episcopalians in the US refuse ultimatum; conservatives reorganising

Harry der Nederlanden

The Anglican Church, including the Episcopal Church in the US, has always considered itself as one worldwide communion under the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury. That unity is now undergoing a severe test, as the global south of the Anglican community has confronted the US church with an ultimatum.

While some newspaper headlines announced that the US bishops meeting in New Orleans Sept. 21-25 had struck a mediating position to avoid schism, conservatives saw it differently. At issue between the US church and those of the global south is the consecration of an openly gay man, Eugene Robinson, as Bishop of New Hampshire and a move toward blessing same-sex unions. These actions have been condemned as contrary to biblical authority and to the teachings of the Anglican Church not just by bishops abroad but by a large number of conservative bishops in the US as well. Nevertheless, the US church, as well as the Canádian, has been moving step by step toward the normalization of homosexual relationships.

The churches of the global south gave the US church a deadline of Sept. 30 to pledge that it would refrain from electing any more openly homosexual bishops and from blessing same-sex unions. Several conservative dioceses in the US have already placed themselves under the oversight of bishops outside the country. And archbishops of four African countries – Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda – have consecrated American bishops for conservative dioceses in the US.

Thousands of members and many clergy have already left

See **Episcopalians** *on p. 2*

Bishop Robert Duncan

News

New political deal angers Pakistanis

President Pervez Musharraf was reelected this weekend by Pakistan's lawmakers, but many are furious about his power-sharing deal with former leader Benazir Bhutto.

Mark Sappenfield

Islamabad, Pakistan – Atif Jehangir sits in the half-light of Rajah Market on a cool late-summer evening and says that the events of the past week here could push him to terrorism.

It is an unexpected admission, not only because the young business student could be the face of Pakistani moderation: educated, beardless, and dressed in Western clothes. But also because the power-sharing deal announced last week between President Pervez Musharraf and political leader Benazir Bhutto has been hailed in many corners of the West as the keystone to political calm.

Instead it has set Mr. Jehangir alight: "There is no way this is going to bring stability," he says. "It is going to create more terrorists among people like me."

Rhetoric often teeters toward the extreme in Pakistan, but there is no doubt that Mr. Musharraf's reelection this past weekend – and his pact with Ms. Bhutto – has only increased anger across much of the country.

Citizens see it not as a step toward democracy, but as a United States-brokered deal to prop up Pakistan's ruling elite, which is almost universally viewed as corrupt. As such, the deal exacerbates two of Pakistanis' most deeply ingrained frustrations: that America meddles too much in its affairs, and that justice is subverted by the rich and withheld from the poor.

Bhutto

Musharraf

With America's aid, Musharraf and Bhutto "are both saving each other," says electrician Khalid Iqbal. "She wants the [prime minister's] chair and he wants to save his skin."

Is Musharraf's victory legal?

Musharraf was overwhelmingly reelected president Saturday by Pakistan's federal and provincial legislatures (the president is not elected by the people), but the Supreme Court has not yet decided whether his candidacy was legal.

The question regards the legality of Musharraf's status as both president and Army chief and the court says it will rule no earlier than Oct. 17.

Until then, the deal between Musharraf and Bhutto remains in limbo. Yet the outlines are clear. If, as expected, the court legitimizes the election, Musharraf will take off the Army uniform, and Bhutto will be allowed to run for a third term as prime minister.

Already, Musharraf has passed an amnesty bill that allows Bhutto to return to the country Oct. 18 free of charges that she robbed millions from the government during her previous administrations in the 1980s and '90s.

It's this aspect that most infuriates Pakistanis in general, and student Jehangir in particular. "All the thieves and corrupt people have been forgiven," he says. "What justice is this?"

Rather than a break from the past, when Pakistan was governed by military dictators and ineffective civilians, the deal is seen as a continuation of it.

"What Pakistan really needs is its institutions to be built in such a way that the process of democracy comes into the hands of the institutions, not the individuals," says Khalid Rahman, a political scientist at the Institute for Policy Studies in Islamabad. "This is increasing the power of the individual."

It has increased the perception that power trumps justice in Pakistan. In this respect, Jehangir looks to Americans with envy. "Whatever their religion or beliefs, at least they have rule of law."

But America's reputed role in bringing the deal about – pushing two enemies together to give Musharraf's rule the sheen of democracy – also adds to a pervasive sense of helplessness here.

Among the friends with Jehangir outside Rajah Market, one man who refuses to give his name blurts out: "America has coordinated this whole thing. They chose the president. They chose the prime minister. Why are you even asking us our opinion?"

Bhutto's return seen as tainted

Indeed, many Pakistanis feel that their future has now been decided, and they have not even had a say in it. Years ago, perhaps, Bhutto's return from exile in London would have been a victory for the people.

But for many Pakistanis, she has compromised herself with this deal, putting herself in league with an unloved president, then following that up with a number of ill-advised statements. For example, she has said she would allow US forces into Pakistan to look for Osama bin Laden.

It is a hugely unpopular idea here – not so much because of support for bin Laden, but rather resentment of America's influence.

Perhaps, in a longstanding Pakistani tradition, she is merely securing US support to consolidate her bid to return to power. But "judging by her statements ... it seems Bhutto doesn't have her hand on the pulse of the public anymore," says Rasul Baksh Rais, a political scientist at the Lahore University of Management Sciences.

This has boosted Pakistan's other exiled former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, who has been able to cast himself as the anti-Musharraf choice, though it is uncertain that he will be allowed back into the country. It has also elevated the status of Pakistan's lawyers, who began the current uprising against Musharraf six months ago, taking to the streets when the president tried to sack the chief justice of the Supreme Court.

The lawyers fired back by putting forward their own presidential nominee, Wajihuddin Ahmad, and there has been talk of establishing a lawyer's party to contest the January parliamentary elections. But Mr. Ahmad says it is still early: "First, let us see what comes out of this chaos."

Mark Sappenfield is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor. *Shahan Mufti contributed to this report.*

Episcopalians *...continued from p.1*

the Episcopalian church as a result of the controversy. Over the last two decades the church has lost about one-third of its membership; yet, the leadership keeps pushing its agenda of left-wing causes as passionately as evangelical churches push evangelism. The bishops did express strenuous objection to the incursions of the African bishops into their domain.

The statement issued by the bishops meeting in New Orleans did strike a conciliatory note: it promised that in the immediate future it would exercise restraint with regard to the consecration of homosexual bishops and that no rite would be approved blessing same-sex unions. They did admit that this does not impose an outright ban on future gay bishops, nor does it prevent individual bishops from blessing same-sex unions.

The US church, they pointed out, is self-governing as is every Anglican province. There is no over-all authority like the Catholic Church other than a commitment to unity and consensus.

Bishop Peter Lee, speaking for the bishops, stressed cultural differences within the global Anglican communion: "The Episcopal Church of the United States has a major role for bishops, elected lay people, and elected other clergy in addition to bishops in our governance at every level of the church, and that's not true of some other provinces in the communion where bishops have an almost monarchical authority in some places. I think for others around the world to understand that about us has been very important, and it's important for us to understand where they're coming from as well."

In the eyes of the conservatives, this amounts to a statement that the bishops intend to continue on the path on which they have set out. It is a path that the global communion, especially in Africa, has condemned as contrary to Scripture. Archbishop Peter Akin-ola of Nigeria, voicing the view-point of most of his colleagues in Africa, said that what was expected from the US bishops was a change of heart, and act of repentance. Instead, the US church persists in trying to win the other churches to its way of thinking.

Liberal Anglicans responded by pointing to biblical teachings on justice and inclusion.

Although the Episcopalian leadership keeps downplaying the threat of schism, a number of conservative bishops in the US have already taken steps to organize an Anglican Union as an alternative to staying with what they consider a "deformed' church. Thirteen bishops have formed a group called the Common Cause Partnership which brings together a dozen formerly separate traditionalist groups.

The new organization hopes to set up a province that is based on a shared theology rather than a a shared geography as is current practice. However, the leadership has consistently rejected previous overtures toward such a move within present structure.

Fifty-one bishops representing some 600 congregations attended the first meeting of the Common Cause, but not all traditionalist groups were represented, as some are committed to remaining to work within the Episcopalian Church. The new partnership plans to hold its first constitutional convention late next year. Although they are conservative, there are important differences among the groups, such as on the ordination of women as bishops, which could prove formidable obstacles to union.

One of the leaders of the conservatives who has been working hard to organize the Common Cause Partnership, Bishop Robert Duncan said, "The goal has been to bring together all of those who stand on scripture, who stand with the tradition, who are committed to mission and who can't bring themselves to separate from what Christians have always believed. So we're working together as bishops, forming a college of bishops, again first ever meeting here, who can work together in mission. We've shared all kinds of ministry initiatives together, from ministry to youth, all kinds of exciting things with postmoderns to work with the global church in relief and development to the more ordinary matters of church planting. Indeed one of the calls of this conference was for us together to plant 1000 new churches, which would be quite something to see."

News/Politics

Britain aims to rule the waves again

Mark Rice-Oxley

London – Britain prided itself on ruling the waves in the 19th century; they might once again in the 21st century. But not with its Navy. This time, Britain's chosen vessels are new technologies that convert the pounding of the waves and the ebbing of tides into the thrum of electricity.

While still years behind other alternative-energy forms, wave and tidal power systems are already in the pipeline in Britain. Officials here stress that Britain aims to become a world leader in the new form of energy.

A range of multimillion-pound projects have been announced in recent weeks, promising to generate enough electricity for thousands of homes.

In addition, the government has ordered a feasibility study into a $30 billion, 10-mile hydroelectric barrage across the Severn estuary in western England, which could provide almost five percent of the country's energy needs.

Sea power is an obvious solution for Britain. Its exposure to gusty Atlantic winds mean that wave patterns are ripe for power generation. Its craggy 7,000-mile coastline, comprising hundreds of islets, makes for fast-moving tidal currents that offer substantial hydroelectric possibilities.

"We have about the best resource in the world for both wave and tidal," says Gordon Edge of the British Wind Energy Association, the trade and professional body for Britain's wind and marine renewables industries. "Any country with a west coast does well for wave power because prevailing winds tend to come from the west." Even better, he adds, if you have a large ocean out to the west, across which prevailing winds can whip up large waves.

Private sector leads the way

A Scottish company, Pelamis Wave Power, has spearheaded private-sector efforts to develop technology that can be towed out to sea and convert wave motion into energy.

Its large, red "sea snakes" are to be deployed in two "wave farms" in Britain – a three megawatt system off the Orkney Islands in Scotland and a second one off Cornwall in southwest England. The "snakes" are also ready to be towed to a site off the coast of Portugal.

The Orkney islands also host a marine energy think tank and testing site, the European Marine Energy Centre. "There is enormous potential," says Jennifer Norris, the center's research manager. "Wave and tidal systems have a big place in the future" of power generation in Britain.

On tidal systems, meanwhile, the European power company E.ON is developing a facility off western England that will produce enough energy to power 5,000 homes.

Overall, wave and tidal systems have the potential to deliver up to 20 percent of Britain's electricity needs, experts say – a tempting opportunity in a country that is struggling to meet EU targets for sourcing one-fifth of energy supply from renewables by 2020, and will probably fail to attain its own goal to cut CO_2 emissions by 20 percent over the 1990-2010 period.

But there are telling challenges to sea power, principally involving cost and environmental threats.

Concerns over coastal habitat

Last week, the government was warned by its own task force, the Sustainable Development Commission, that if it wanted to build the Severn tidal system it would have to address major concerns over loss of estuary habitats for rare species.

"The enormous potential for a Severn barrage to help reduce our carbon emissions and improve energy security needs to be balanced against the impact on the estuary's unique habitat," said commission chairman Jonathan Porritt, adding that the government, not the private sector, would have to take charge to assure "a sustainable long-term approach."

Even if it finds an environmentally acceptable solution, the formidable cost of the barrage will produce electricity three times more expensive per kWh than gas.

Cost is a major hurdle for wave power developers, too. Early systems suggest a cost of as much as 25 cents per kWh, expensive even in a world of rising hydrocarbon prices.

But developers are sanguine. New technology is always pricey, and costs will fall if enough power suppliers order the systems. They have already started: in Britain, power suppliers are compelled by a government-imposed "renewables obligation" to source a growing proportion of energy from renewables. To give marine energy a leg up, it will count double.

"There has never been a new technology that has been economic out of the box," says Max Carcas, business development director at Pelamis Wave Power. "If you look at coal-fired generation in the UK in the 1920s, it was 50 cents per kWh. Over time that came down." So, he adds, did the cost of wind turbines, which have fallen 80 percent over the past 25 years.

In any case, he argues, better to invest now than be sorry in 50 years. "It's a global concern to bring on new energy technology that will displace CO_2-emitting technology," Carcas says.

Pontes adds that if the environmental cost of hydrocarbons are factored in, gas and oil-based power generation doesn't look so cheap anymore. "If you have a carbon tax, then there would be similar costs for conventional energy sources" as for renewable energy, she says.

Authority and the Image of God

Principalities & Powers
David T. Koyzis

The conventional wisdom has it that authority and liberty are opposites. When one expands, the other necessarily contracts, as if the relationship between the two is a kind of zero-sum game. In a society strongly influenced by liberalism, it is assumed that liberty must continually enlarge its sphere of action and grow stronger, usually at the expense of authority. Accordingly authority is deemed at most a necessary evil, to be kept in its place and perhaps even encroached upon as liberty expands its scope.

Anarchists believe that authority may not even be necessary. Because of the innate virtues of human beings freed from the dictates of others, it is possible to construct a society founded entirely on mutuality and voluntary co-operation. If authority can be said to exist, it is at most a temporary authority exercised on an *ad hoc* basis over those freely consenting to it – soon to be replaced by a similar authority exercised by someone else. But there can be no permanent offices authorized to command obedience on an ongoing basis.

Classical liberals are willing to affirm authority – including political authority – but it is a derived authority, limited by the parties to the social contract that brought it into being in the first place. The early liberals, such as John Locke, believed the civil commonwealth existed to protect life, liberty and property, the last of which was modified by Thomas Jefferson to the "pursuit of happiness." If the parties to the contract decide they want government to provide a variety of goods and services beyond mere protection, they are within their rights to demand them. If government fails to follow their dictates, they may "appeal to heaven," a Lockean euphemism for a possibly violent overthrow of the political authorities. For Locke there is nothing intrinsically authoritative about authority; it is the mere agent of the people, who have consented to submit to it only in so far as it does their bidding.

But what if it turns out that authority is not opposed to liberty after all? Most political philosophers admit that we really do need authority, even if they have a certain suspicion of its several manifestations. Imagine an attempt to build bicycles based simply on the good will of the participants without an overall co-ordinating authority. There would be too many handlebars relative to frames, ill-fitting wheels not all of which would be the same size, not enough pedals to go around and – ultimately – no functioning bicycles. Leaving everyone free to follow her own dictates would simply not do in this case.

There is another way to frame the issue. It may be that what we tend to think of as individual liberty or freedom is, after all, one more type of authority. When parents recognize that their adolescent son is coming of age, they increasingly give up the authority they formerly had over him, acknowledging his greater authority over the course of his own life. He will decide for himself on a career path, whom to marry, where to live and so forth. This is as it should be.

All of us possess authority as a grant from God. To be sure, teachers have teaching authority in the classroom, but students also have their own particular type of authority in that context. Moreover, in so far as we are created in God's image, we can be said to be invested with the authority of an image-bearer – something manifested in different ways in different spheres of life. Respect for authority means nothing less than respect for the image of God in ourselves and in others.

David T. Koyzis will be delivering the Bernard Zylstra Lectures at Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, on Wednesday, November, 7 on the subject of "Authority and the Image of God." Details forthcoming on his blog: <http://byzantinecalvinist.blogspot.com/>.

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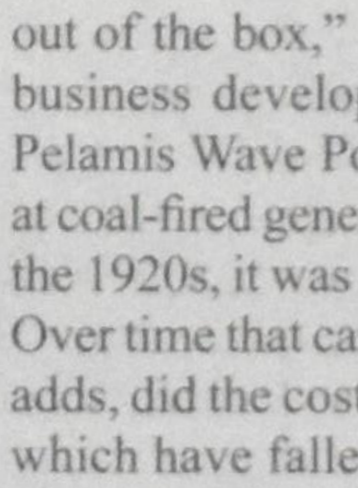

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Editorial

Pain and miracles

Harry der Nederlanden

Going for chemotherapy isn't all bad news. Every other week Rose takes me out for a scenic drive to Hamilton, where, along with the chemo, I get a nice lunch and a big easy chair in which to enjoy it. Seriously, going for treatment can be a heartening experience. Not that anyone enjoys sitting in waiting rooms for long periods or being hooked up to bags of drugs. What is heartening is meeting other people like yourself, who have been coming to the cancer center often for years in their battle with the disease.

Last time, Rose and I met two women who have been traveling back and forth for treatment for several years. The first, a grandmother, has been undergoing treatments for over eight years, first for breast cancer and then for ovarian cancer. We met in the waiting room. The second woman, about the same age, sat in the chair beside mine as we got our chemo refills. She, too, was being treated for ovarian cancer, but before that she had fought a battle with breast cancer, and before that with colorectal cancer. She gave me several hints on how to deal with some of the side-effects of the drugs. Each of her cancers was a primary cancer, that is, the second and third weren't spin-offs from the first like mine. Each was a separate disease. There is a flaw in her DNA. She inherited a propensity to develop cancer.

The two women, each wearing the typical kerchief that signals hair loss, were surprisingly upbeat, even cheerful. One might think that after so many years of treatment they'd be somewhat bitter about having to rely on all this technology to sustain their lives. We often talk about how medical technology tends to dehumanize. But their overarching attitude was one of gratitude to the doctors, the cancer center and the drugs that have given them a longer lease on life.

Keeping up such a long struggle through pain and nausea and all sorts of drug side-effects gives evidence of a great deal of courage and determination. No doubt, they aren't always upbeat, but they are both fighters. For several years, they've had to fight for every year, every month, every week of life. Talking to them, I thought how precious life must be to those who cling to it so desperately. The first woman had exhausted all standard treatments and was now getting an experimental drug.

But was this all just a tenacious clinging to life as such? As the women talked, most of the conversation was about family and about being there for the grandchildren. One thought it a shame that her grandchildren have known her only as the grandma with cancer, but she beamed as she described how her cancer had brought her to Hamilton and closer to her grandchildren, where she could accompany them to soccer games and enjoy their company.

Both of them think of their lives more in terms of being there for others than in terms of having it for themselves. Of course they want to live, but above all they want to love, to give something good of themselves to those they love. Perhaps this is the source of their courage and tenacity. They have hope for the next generation and they want to infuse something of their own selves into their grandchildren.

I see something miraculous in this display of courage. Such love is not a brute animal force. It is the image of God flowing through us. Regardless of whether these women are believers, their love and courage are a sign that the Spirit is still working with the spirit of mankind to engender hope and love and faith.

Sometimes we describe the medical enterprise as a huge machine that has an impersonal momentum of its own. But when you talk to such patients and you see all the bustle and concern devoted to keeping them here with their families, you get a different impression. Whatever may ail modern medicine and our Canadian system, it is nevertheless still part of the healing force that flows from God. Despite cancer and death, and all the forces of dissolution, there is also this miraculous capacity for healing. We generally don't consider what flows from science and technology as miraculous. But it is. All those medical treatments that have rescued millions from the verge of death – almost routinely – at one time did not exist. People had to discover and create these therapies, but they did so by discovering the healing properties in creation that the Creator put there. One might say that they are a sign and precursor of a world to come in which those healing properties, that wholeness, will no longer be a desperate struggle.

Still, what we usually mean by a miracle is some unique and spectacular event that bypasses the normal vehicles. My mother was diagnosed with colon cancer in the seventies and her doctors gave her about six months to live. So we all hurried home to visit mom. But she entered into a regimen of chemo treatment. Her church held a special prayer service. Several members of the congregation began to visit her on a regular basis. Several years later they were still visiting, and she became Maranatha's bona fide miracle.

When she was in her nineties and living in with us, she suffered chronic pain: arthritis, deteriorating knees, shingles, angina and more. Although she had an indomitable spirit, always ready to laugh, there were times all that pain would get to her.

One day she was standing in the doorway leaning on her walker, puffing, and she said, "Sometimes I think if only God would grant me one day free of pain – how wonderful that would be. But I know that wouldn't make me happy. Then I'd want another day. And another."

That's the trouble with miracles. We're not easily satisfied with just one. If God miraculously without benefit of drugs takes away our pain one day, why not the next...and the next? Miracles are unexpected and unpredictable. They don't follow our rules of rationality, fairness, equality or democracy. So although we celebrate them as gifts of grace, they can also seem arbitrary, even unjust. Why should an 80-year-old have a miracle of healing while a young mother or child dies?

At the same time that my mother was diagnosed with cancer, so was her neighbor – a mother with several young children. She died. She also belonged to the Maranatha congregation, and the church prayed just as fervently for her as for my mother. When she died my mother said, "It doesn't seem fair. I would have gladly traded places with her so that she could live."

So our longings for miracles can be a tricky business. Given my condition, I have not prayed for a miracle of healing. If your leg is amputated, you don't pray for the Lord to grow you a new one. When old age is making you decrepit, you don't pray for the Lord to give you the body you had when you were 25 years old. The several tumors on my lungs and liver will not go away. The chemo treatments may stop their growth for a while and perhaps shrink them for a time, but they are not a cure.

Quite a few people have told me that they are praying for a miracle so that I will be restored to full health. That makes me glad, and I hope they continue those prayers. But my prayers are more modest: for the nearness of the Lord, especially for my family, for the wisdom of my doctor and for the efficacy of the treatments. All of modern medicine has the aura of the miraculous for me. That someone could cut my belly open, snip off a section of my colon, and sew me up again so that I could have several more years of life – that's miraculous.

But last week early Sunday morning I was driven to plead for a sudden miracle. As the night wore on, the pain in my side grew increasingly fierce. By 3 a.m. I was at my wit's end. Even the most shallow of breaths sent a sword through my side. After a while all I could do was sit on the edge of my bed and pant shallow breaths. I began to get dressed to have Rose take me in to emergency so I could get a shot for the pain. When I looked in on her, however, she was sleeping so peacefully that I didn't have the heart to wake her and to disturb her with my crisis.

Nevertheless, the pain kept getting worse, so that after a while I could hardly breathe anymore. I was pressed to pray, "Lord, I haven't asked for a miracle before this, but I beg you to send an angel and give me some relief, I don't even need to see him...." And even as I was still forming the words, the pain ebbed from my body and I could breathe.

I couldn't believe it. I thanked God several dozen times, but then I sat in my chair waiting for the pain to return. At last at 5 a.m. I dared to crawl back into bed and dropped off to sleep.

I have not been cured of cancer, of course, and have had pain since, though not as severe. But I have had my miracle. The next time I'm attacked by severe pain, I have better pain killers on hand. I'm not counting on another miracle.

But it is a wonderful thing, nevertheless, to have experienced it, even if it's only a mini-miracle. For a miracle isn't something to set the world right. It is a sign. It is a sign that whatever suffering comes our way, the Lord is with us, and he is preparing a new order in which we will not have to plead for special intervention.

That's the big miracle – that God is making everything new even amidst the brokenness and ruins.

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Letters

Alta Vista serving Christian Education: the road ahead

Christian schools have something in common with mushrooms: they pop up everywhere, even in unexpected places. In fact, one of the most astounding global phenomena is the rapid proliferation of Christian schools. From the affluent West to the former Soviet Union and even to the ends of the earth, Christian schools make their appearance everywhere, often amid dismal circumstances.

Like mushrooms, Christian schools are susceptible to a quick demise. Constraint structures such as lack of funding, limited resources and an absence of expertise, along with frequently stifling governmental requirements and regulations, can snuff out what started as a promising venture. The right conditions must be met if the schools are to flourish and impact society. Some Christian schools close shortly after opening their doors. Others expand and grow, but lose their reason for being. Still others are absorbed by the culture in which they were planted and can hardly be recognized as Christian schools at all.

Among the conditions to be met are a solid foundation and the wherewithal to implement the fundamental principles espoused. Christian education, to remain authentically Christian, requires continuous reflection on its character, calling and task. What makes a Christian school different from government schools? What are they supposed to accomplish? Why, in fact, do they exist at all? Schools, moreover, need adequate funding and supporting constituencies and good teachers. Especially in the poorer countries of the world, Christian schools lack adequate facilities and resources.

To help meet the required conditions, both at home and abroad, various organizations have come into existence. CSI, ACSI, Worldwide Christian Schools, and Christian teacher associations are some examples. Lutheran and Catholic school affiliations and teacher education programs at Christian colleges, too, are busy helping Christian schools stay alive and flourish. Enter still another organization: Seattle-based Alta Vista.

Alta Vista was the brainchild of Dr. Al Greene. Well known in Christian educational circles for his lectures, publications, and encouragement, Al became to many of us a sort of "spiritual father," whose vision and gentleness served as models for a younger (and often more impatient) generation. Originally conceived as possibly on the way to become a college, Alta Vista came to be known as Alta Vista College. It offered courses in Christian perspectives on education, provided workshops, conducted academic sessions with university students, and, in general, worked hard to promote a vision of distinctively Christian education of a reformational stripe. After Al's retirement, Elaine Brouwer and Larry Reynolds, among others, carried on the work as co-directors and kept Alta Vista on the educational map.

Beginning with Al Greene, much of the effort of Alta Vista has been defined by the commitment to see Christian schools not simply as important church-related institutions or four walls to protect children from the evil world, but as places where students are equipped to identify, challenge, and counteract the spirits of the age. The Christian community is to be a bright light and healing presence in the dark world beset by sin, evil, greed, and selfishness. Christians are called to be stewardly, loving agents of reconciliation. Christian education plays a key role in heeding the call.

This commitment prompts Alta Vista's mission: to be a Spirit-directed voice of hope, discernment, and empowerment in the realm of Christian education. Alta Vista seeks to advance the important task of equipping students for "works of service" (Eph. 4:11-13). When we think of Christian education, we think, first of all, of Christian schools. And indeed, much of Alta Vista's work is geared to Christian school communities both at home and abroad. Included in its programs, however, are services to home schoolers and to Christian teachers teaching in our government schools.

Alta Vista, in short, seeks to sound forth a prophetic and hopeful voice in our hurting world. During the past year or so, the board and staff of Alta Vista have been busy reviewing identity, vision, and mission statements. In addition, plans for future expansion and activity were carefully explored and articulated. Meanwhile, John Van Dyk, recently retired from Dordt College, has joined the staff as Senior Member. John's domestic and international educational ministry will now become a part of Alta Vista's agenda. He will do his work from out of his home, part of which has been transformed into an Alta Vista satellite office.

The agenda of Alta Vista is ambitious. On the program is a series of summer sessions, professional certification classes, and consulting services. Plans are under way to produce resources, publications, and electronic materials. The international outreach is currently focused on Latin America, Asia, and Europe.

Alta Vista vigorously pursues partnerships and collaboration. Avoiding wasteful duplication and independent "empire building," the organization looks for ways to contribute, humbly but courageously, to the welfare of Christian education globally. Its ultimate goal is to seek first the Kingdom of God.

Alta Vista looks forward to a promising future. The challenges are many, but so are the opportunities. Christian education is in many places at the crossroads. Which way will it turn? The continual requests and invitations to address fundamental questions of calling, distinctiveness, purpose and task, along with growing national and international concern for and interest in the global issues of justice, environment, poverty, health and peace, will keep Alta Vista occupied for years to come, Deo volente.

Elaine Brouwer
John Van Dyk
Senior Members,
Alta Vista Educational Services
Seattle, WA / Sioux Center, IA

A wake-up call to the Reformed community

How sad that the public policy debate about funding independent schools is so juvenile and cheap (*Tory Risks Election ..., CC September 24*). Our political discourse aims to distort, denigrate, and disparage.

There is a remedy. Proportional representation offers politicians an incentive to cooperate and build consensus. At this writing, the Ontario referendum on proportional representation appears headed for defeat. Why did the Christian community not back this proposal more strongly? How disappointing that particularly the Reformed community which talks about redeeming politics failed to solidly support this rare opportunity to make politics less adversarial.

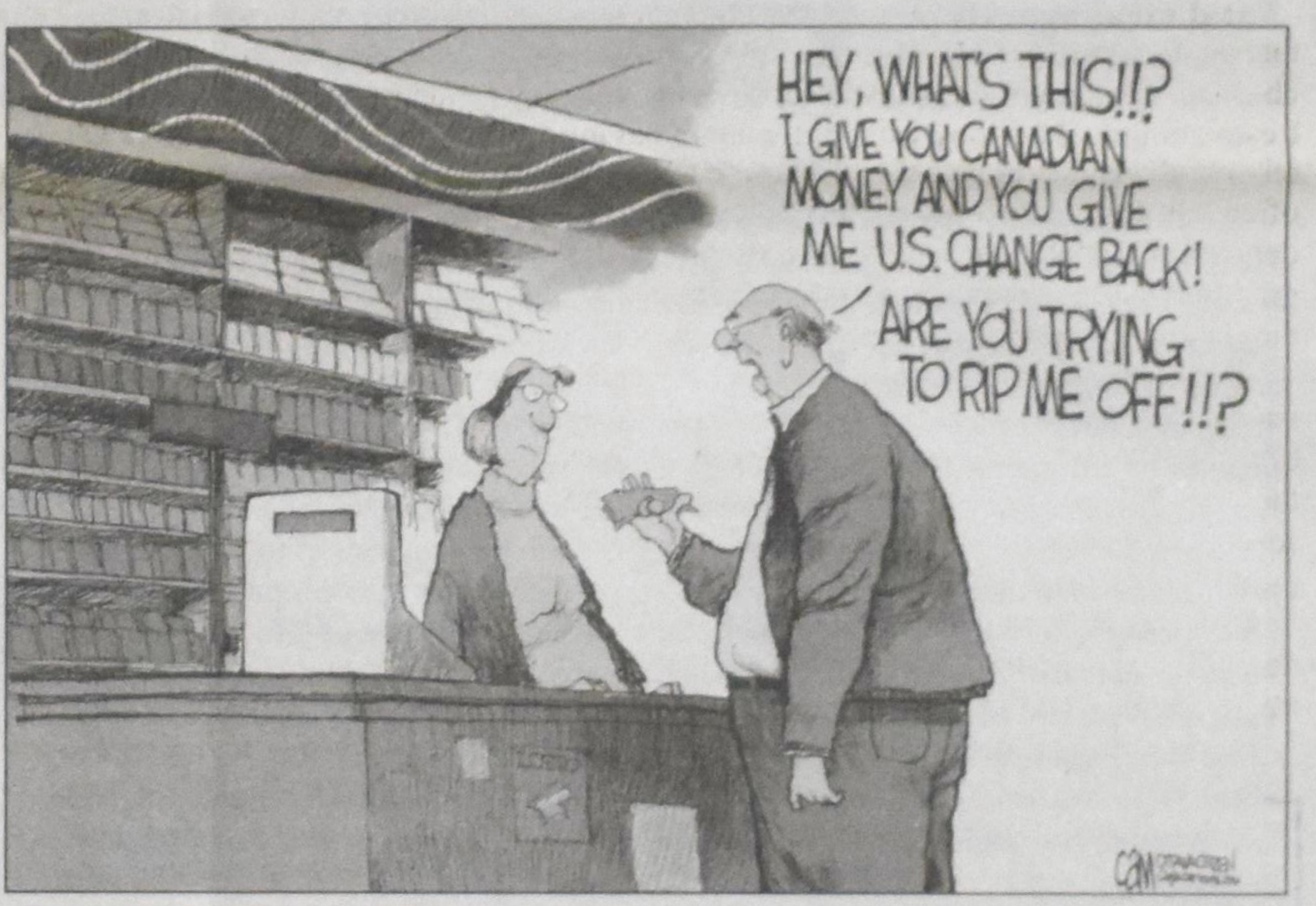
Fewer support public funding for independent schools, today, than, for example, thirty years ago when British Columbia changed its policy. There is a growing apprehension about minorities. Quebec is currently debating the concept of accommodation and Western Europe is increasingly less open to multi-culturalism.

Such a climate needs governing structures that are inclusive, that promote dialogue and consensus. Proportional representation is exactly what Canada needs, today. Why were Christians not pushing for this? Where was the Committee for Contact with Government? Will the Christian community as yet do on the federal scene what they failed to do in Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia?

The Reformed community has supported Christian schools for fifty years. Has it produced a Christian mind, a Christian cultural task that seeks to redeem politics? In a recent CC edition, Harry Van Belle defended the claim that Kyperian thought was alive and well among the Reformed in Canada. But tellingly, nearly all his examples are of Canadians performing good deeds overseas.

Ontario's shouting match/brawl about tax money for religious schools and our lukewarm support for a more civilized politics is a wakeup call to the Reformed community. We need to better understand and act on our Christian calling in Canada's public life. If we are to redeem politics, what does that mean? If it does not mean proportional representation, what does it mean?

Nick Loenen
Richmond, BC



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Opinion

The madness of moral equivalence

We must acknowledge our roots, to understand ourselves. And only then can we begin to understand people with different roots. The person who denies his own origins can understand nothing. (David Warren, *Ottawa Citizen*, October 7, 2007)

Harry Antonides

Refugees escaping to the free West from the soul-destroying tyrannies must have a difficult time understanding the self-loathing attitude among the western elite. Their difficulty is further complicated when they discover that the latter's foremost target of contempt is the United States of America.

This contempt is also alive and well among the Canadian media elite and can regularly be seen on the CBC and in the pages of the print media. A revealing demonstration of that mindset is Rick Salutin's article in the *Globe and Mail* of September 28, 2007, entitled "So, really, who's the buffoon?"

Fatal misdiagnosis

Rick Salutin, who is known as "a strong advocate of left wing causes," outdid himself in playing the game of moral equivalence. He dismissed the critics of those who gave Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a platform at the UN and at Columbia University as "acting way over the top."

He describes the introduction of Ahmadinejad by Columbia University president Lee Bollinger as a "fairly brazen way to welcome a campus guest." Salutin reports that the president accused his guest of exhibiting signs of being a petty, cruel and fanatical dictator. But he thinks that such criticisms can also be made of the West, and of the U.S. President. He lists among the sins of the U.S. "human rights outrages such as Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib" as well as "state sponsorship of terror."

Salutin places the Iranian president's speeches in a world perspective in which the West has been the bully to the rest of the world. He says that there is a new game in which the role gets reversed. Now it is the turn of Ahmadinejad – and Hugo Chavez, who praised Noam Chomsky at the UN last year, while demonizing the U.S. President – to "laugh at the inane Western bully."

Salutin is convinced that the important issue is not "some fictitious war of civilizations," but who gets to define reality. In this conflict, he reasons that the power of the West is not based on higher civilizational values but on its ability to dominate, economically, militarily, and culturally. In other words, on brute force.

He concludes therefore that the issue is not who is right or wrong (the western democracies or their enemies) but the fact that "the civilizational playing field is finally being leveled." He makes sure to couch this insight into the most offensive and demeaning terms:

> *Criticisms like those made against the Iran leader can easily be made of the West, and George Bush, and often are.... It's not a question which leader is the real buffoon. Both qualify. It's about who gets to draw the line....*

This is an astoundingly perverse redefinition of the conflict between a civilization ruled by sharia law where every aspect of life is rigidly and often brutally controlled, versus the West where the basic freedoms of belief, speech and association are imbedded in law and custom. To reduce this conflict to a fight between two equally laughable, buffoonish leaders is moral equivalence gone mad.

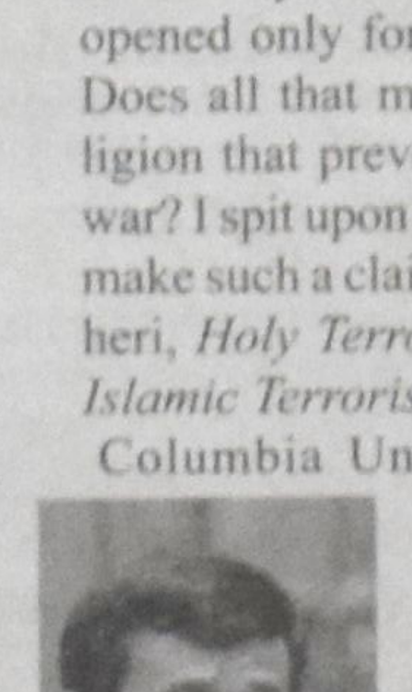
Western democracies are far from perfect, but they have attained a level of shared prosperity, decency and civility that is unprecedented and that has attracted millions of refugees and immigrants, including large numbers from Iran.

Fortunately for Salutin, he has never lived in a country such as Iran. If he did and spouted the ideas he freely dispenses in Canada, he would soon find himself rotting in prison, or worse.

The call to Jihad

The Islamic Republic of Iran was founded by the widely revered Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1900 –1989) who preached a radical version of the Islamic religion with a world-embracing ambition. Here is the reason and methods of such a regime in the words of the Ayatollah himself:

> ...Islam makes it incumbent on all adult males...to prepare themselves for the conquest of [other] countries so that the writ of Islam is obeyed in every country in the world.... But those who study Islamic Holy War will understand why Islam wants to conquer the whole world.... People cannot be made obedient except with the sword! The sword is the key to Paradise, which can be opened only for the Holy Warriors!... Does all that mean that Islam is a religion that prevents men from waging war? I spit upon those foolish souls who make such a claim. (Quoted in Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror: Inside the World of Islamic Terrorism*, pp. 241-243)



Ahmadinejad

Columbia University's invitation to Ahmadinejad was an insult not only to what the university historically represents, such as notions of truthfulness, honour and freedom. It is no less an insult to those Iranians who have been imprisoned, tortured and killed, and those who are now suffering under this brutal regime.

The current Islamist rulers of Iran are determined to acquire nuclear power, and Ahmadinejad has pledged to destroy Israel – and America. Furthermore, Iran is supporting terrorist organizations Hamas and Hezbollah, enabling them to spread terror in the Middle East and destabilizing Israel and Lebanon. There is good reason to believe that it is also actively supporting the killers in Iraq with their murderous campaign against American soldiers and defenceless Iraqi citizens.

Instead of treating Iran as a country that violates every pledge of its membership of the UN, Ahmadinejad was invited to address the UN as if he were a representative of a member state in good standing. But the reality is very different.

A good source of information on this score is the Iranian-born author Amir Taheri, who has authored several books and currently is a regular columnist for a number of publications. (His material is also available on the Benador Associates website.)

"Cleansing" the universities

In his column dated September 7, 2007, Taheri explains that president Amadinejad is following in the footsteps of the Ayatollah Khomeini who masterminded the first "Islamic Cultural Revolution." In 1980, Khomeini charged a committee, including the current "Supreme Guide" Ali Khamenei and two former presidents, with "cleansing" all centres of higher education.

This committee did not take half measures. It closed all universities and related institutions for two years, during which it purged over 6000 university professors and lecturers. Dozens of them were executed and many fled the country.

When the universities reopened they were staffed by loyal adherents to Khomeinism, including members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The works of many authors were banned, including those of Taheri, and textbooks were re-written.

Despite these drastic attempts to reshape education, they did not prevent Iranian universities from becoming centres of opposition to Khomeinist ideology.

To eliminate that opposition, Ahmadinejad has started the second "Islamic Cultural Revolution" by appointing what Taheri calls a "semi-literate mullah" as Chancellor of Tehran University, Iran's oldest and largest centres of higher education. Other measures to insure that the "enemies of Islam" are defeated included the following:

- Over 20 college deans have been replaced, and scores of professors and lecturers have been fired, while dozens of academics were arrested.
- Thirty privately owned colleges have been closed and their assets seized, while 13 others are under investigation, possibly interrupting the studies of some 100,000 students.
- An unknown number of students has been arrested. Student leaders have "disappeared," including 150 in Tehran. The families of two known students claim that they may have died under torture.
- A special force commanded by an IRGC veteran has been assigned the task of "ensuring a peaceful atmosphere" at centres of higher learning, where armed guards are posted to prevent anti-regime demonstrations.

You need not take the word of this veteran Iran expert alone to believe this sad tale of abuses against the people of Iran. On March 12, 2007, an international coalition of human rights groups called on nine European government ministers to rebuke Iran for its repression of women, dissidents and religious and ethnic minorities.

Human rights trampled

The coalition appealed to the governments of Switzerland, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, France, Liechtenstein, and Norway, to use all its influence at the UN Human Rights Council to "speak out strongly against Iran's gross violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...."

The coalition referred to the UN General Assembly Resolution of December 19, 2006, which cited Iran for these gross violations of human rights: "violence against women; harassment and intimidation of journalists, human rights defenders, political opponents, and workers' advocates; absence of due process; torture; public execution; increasing discrimination, including violent crackdowns, and other human rights violations against" a number of listed minorities.

In Iran the legal age for marriage is nine for girls. In 2000, the Iranian Parliament voted to raise the minimum age for girls to fourteen, but a legislative oversight body dominated by clerics vetoed this move. (Ayatollah Khomeini married a ten-year-old girl.)

In 2004, a sixteen-year-old girl, Atefeh Rajabi was hanged in a public square in Iran for being charged with adultery – which probably meant that she was raped. Eight women are now in prison in Iran awaiting death by stoning. And let's never forget the torture and murder of the Canadian journalist Zahra Kazemi in July 2003.

Iran is not alone in its barbaric treatment of women. All sharia-ruled countries treat women as people without rights, often isolated in their own homes, the victims of so-called honour killings and of divorce unilaterally decided by men, and subjected to genital mutilation and other forms of abuse.

Yet Ahmadinejad had the gall to depict America as a place of oppression, while bragging about the benefits of Islamic rule and the complete freedom enjoyed by the women of Iran. And he got away with it because no one had the insight and courage to expose the blatant lies of this imposter to his face.

The authorities responsible for providing a forum for this charlatan in the heart of the

Kazakhstan women met to combat loneliness, then tackled government

Peter Kenny

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (ENI) – Margarita Zobnina, a medical biologist in the nursing profession, joined a women's group in her native Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union, at a time when women faced not only increasing impoverishment but also loneliness.

Zobnina, now a social worker, lives in Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan. It is a city that today is booming with the trappings of modern Asian success – glass skyscrapers and motor exhaust fumes. Some residents are cashing in on the oil wealth of a country the size of western Europe, and one that has the highest-known hydrocarbon deposits in the Caspian region of Central Asia. Many aid agencies, however, report a growing gap between rich and poor.

She works with self-help groups, the first in Kazakhstan of a chain of what many describe now as "civil society". These associations, says Zobnina, have shown that they are not just places for women seeking company, but that those who belong have the guts to fight for their rights in a region said to lag behind many countries in respecting women's rights. One group Zobnina works with took on the postal ministry over the exploitation of women employees, and this in a country that some human rights groups say can be authoritarian. The women won.

"A friend of mine told me about an NGO [non-governmental organization] for lonely women. In the Soviet days we didn't have NGOs, and some people might shun such a group. But I don't believe there's any shame in being lonely," says 58-year-old Zobnina, a product of the post Second World War baby boom in the Soviet Union.

Kazakhstan is made up of about 54 percent Kazakhs, and has a 30 percent Russian, and Russian-speaking, minority, to which Zobnina belongs.

At the beginning, Zobnini explains, the group for lonely women was called "The voluntary organization of single mothers. For us who had everything organized for us in Soviet times, such a thing as involvement in a self-help group was a big step into the unknown.

"Our women's association was founded originally in 1993. That was just after Kazakhstan gained its independence. While we were part of the Soviet Union there was a system in place for dealing with many social issues. Also, many women were employed.

"But that had disappeared overnight, and there was nothing to bridge the gap from the old system that people saw taking care of everything they did, to having to do it individually in a market economy," Zobnina told ENI. She was attending a conference of self-help group workers in Bishkek, about three hours' drive from Almaty.

"There's a lot of poverty, especially it seems among women," Zobnina explained. "Our organization gets them going with self-help groups, helping them improve their confidence to deal with problems themselves, and to either demand, or lobby the authorities to deal with their problems."

The grouping to which Zobnina's self-help group belongs is called Moldir. The women's groups that make up Moldir are supported by Christian agencies such as the Netherlands-based InterChurch Cooperation Organization (ICCO), DanChurchAid from Denmark, Norwegian Church Aid, and Britain's Christian Aid.

About 47 percent of the 15 million population of the country are Muslims, and about 40 percent are Christians, many of whom come from the 30 percent Russian ethnic minority in Kazakhstan.

Zobnina recalls with delight how a women's self help group she works with, now called "The Public Union Association of Women" had a big success. In Soviet days female postal employees were given hostel accommodation in post office apartments. After independence, however, they had to begin paying fees for services to post office heads.

"The problem was the women could not afford to pay their employers on the salaries they were receiving," says Zobnina. "We had to take it to the top management and tell them what they were doing was unfair and wrong, and that they would put their own employees out on the streets." Now, the postal workers can afford to live in their accommodation as the rates are in line with their salaries.

Kazakhstan has a constitution that states, "No one shall be subject to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social, property status, occupation, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances."

The International Women's Rights Action Watch says that in practice, however, distinctions made on the basis of gender lead to women's greater representation among the unemployed, and thus an increased risk of them living in poverty, and lower representation in high political office. Women also bear the bulk of the burden of household responsibilities. The rights action group also notes that, as in other countries in the region, domestic violence is a major problem in Kazakhstan.

Dusty Wills

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

"When was the last time you checked your will?" I was asked. Let me see now.... It's certainly been some time, maybe three years ago that I last looked at it.

Has your will collected dust? If it has, it's more than time to check it over. Things change: we change, our families change, and so do our needs and our priorities. These may or may not impact your will, however, it is a very worthwhile and possibly very important exercise to blow the dust off and take a good look.

Here are a few things to look out for:

- Powers of attorney for personal care and property – are they in place? Are the people named there still whom you want to act for you if you become incapacitated?
- Dependent children – are they still dependent? Are the guardians and trustees you selected then still your choice today?
- Tax liabilities – has your financial situation changed? Can you minimize taxes through charitable giving?
- Executors – are they still capable, willing and the right person(s)?
- Charitable giving through your estate – Do you want to make any additions/changes?
- Keepsakes/heirlooms – have you assigned specific bequests of items to minimize family squabbles of special possessions? Does it need updating/changing?
- Are there any succession plans that need to be considered – for the business or farm?
- Any others specific to your situation.

Many of us tend to procrastinate on anything to do with Wills. I suppose we don't want to think about our death. However, it is very important that we do have a current and legal Will – especially for the sake of our loved ones. It is also a process that requires expert advice – from your lawyer and, in more complicated estates, a financial advisor. Christian Stewardship Services (CSS) can help you with this process. Our representatives spend time with individuals and couples going over a very detailed check list that includes all of the above. CSS does not write the Will – that is the job of your lawyer – however, we have assisted thousands of individuals and couples over the years to start and complete their Wills. Even though we don't write the Will, we do provide a detailed letter of instruction that a lawyer can use to draft a legal Will that reflects your wishes on all aspects of a Will – including Christian charitable giving. We advise our clients how charitable giving can be treated favorably inside a Will to ensure the minimization of tax liability and to maximize charitable giving.

CSS can also simplify how charitable gifts are distributed when the Will goes into effect. CSS representatives are not on commission nor do they charge for this service. CSS partners cover the cost of this service through their partnership fees to CSS – because, after all their ministries are the long-term beneficiaries of your estate charitable giving.

Stewardly Tip: Keep a record in a safe, secure place that records all your vital information. Let your executor know where he or she can find that document. Include everything that your executor will need to be concerned with. Include credit card numbers and passwords to accounts, insurance policies, investments – etc. Make sure that he or she knows where to find them (i.e., safety deposit box & key).

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Media Push-Pull

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free West bleat about the value of dialogue and the free flow of ideas. None of that took place. Rather, the enemies of freedom scored a major propaganda victory, and they are now celebrating their victory all over the Islamic world with this message: "Our intrepid hero entered the lions' den and he exposed the lions to be fools and cowards."

That Rick Salutin trivializes the real war between freedom and tyranny is bad enough. But that he does so while calling the American president a buffoon is a deeply offensive abuse of his freedom as a Canadian citizen. It seems to have escaped him that in doing so he is abetting those who are determined to cut short his journalistic career, too.

David Warren is right. Those who deny their own roots understand nothing.

Harry Antonides
hantonides@sympatico.ca

Church

Live with differences say church leaders as Belgium mulls future

Andreas Havinga

Utrecht, Netherlands (ENI) – Churches in Belgium have warned against any moves to break up the country as a result of a crisis that has pitted political parties in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders against those in francophone Wallonia. "In these times we have to learn to live with various convictions.

Splitting Belgium would be an impoverishment and a bad signal to Europe," the Roman Catholic bishop of Bruges, Roger Vangheluwe, told the Catholic weekly newspaper, *Tertio*.

The political impass centres on the issue of more self-rule for Flanders, home to about 60 percent of Belgium's 10.3 million people. Belgium has had only a caretaker government since a parliamentary election in June in which the Flemish Christian Democrat party emerged as the clear winner. The Flemish party is campaigning for more powers to be devolved to the Flanders region, something opposed by political parties of all colours in the French-speaking region of Wallonia.

The disagreement between the political parties has hindered attempts to form a new government and has prompted media to speculate that the 177-year-old country might be better off breaking apart.

Still, the general mood in the Roman Catholic Church, which accounts for 75 percent of Belgium's population, is for the country to remain a federation, *Tertio* reported. It described the common theme of the responses to a telephone survey it mounted in September of clergy and lay people, as being: "Staying together while recognising one another's characteristics".

Belgium is divided into four linguistic areas, the largest two are Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia. The capital Brussels is officially bilingual, and there is a small German-speaking area in the eastern part of the country.

"We are Flemings, but not separatists," was how Johannes Fillet, abbot of Male, summed up his views.

In the past, the Roman Catholic church province of Belgium was deeply split on the issue of regional self-rule, Tertio noted.

The newspaper quoted a leader of the United Protestant Church in Belgium, the Rev. Guy Liagre, as saying the denomination's synod was unswerving in warning against any form of "church separatism".

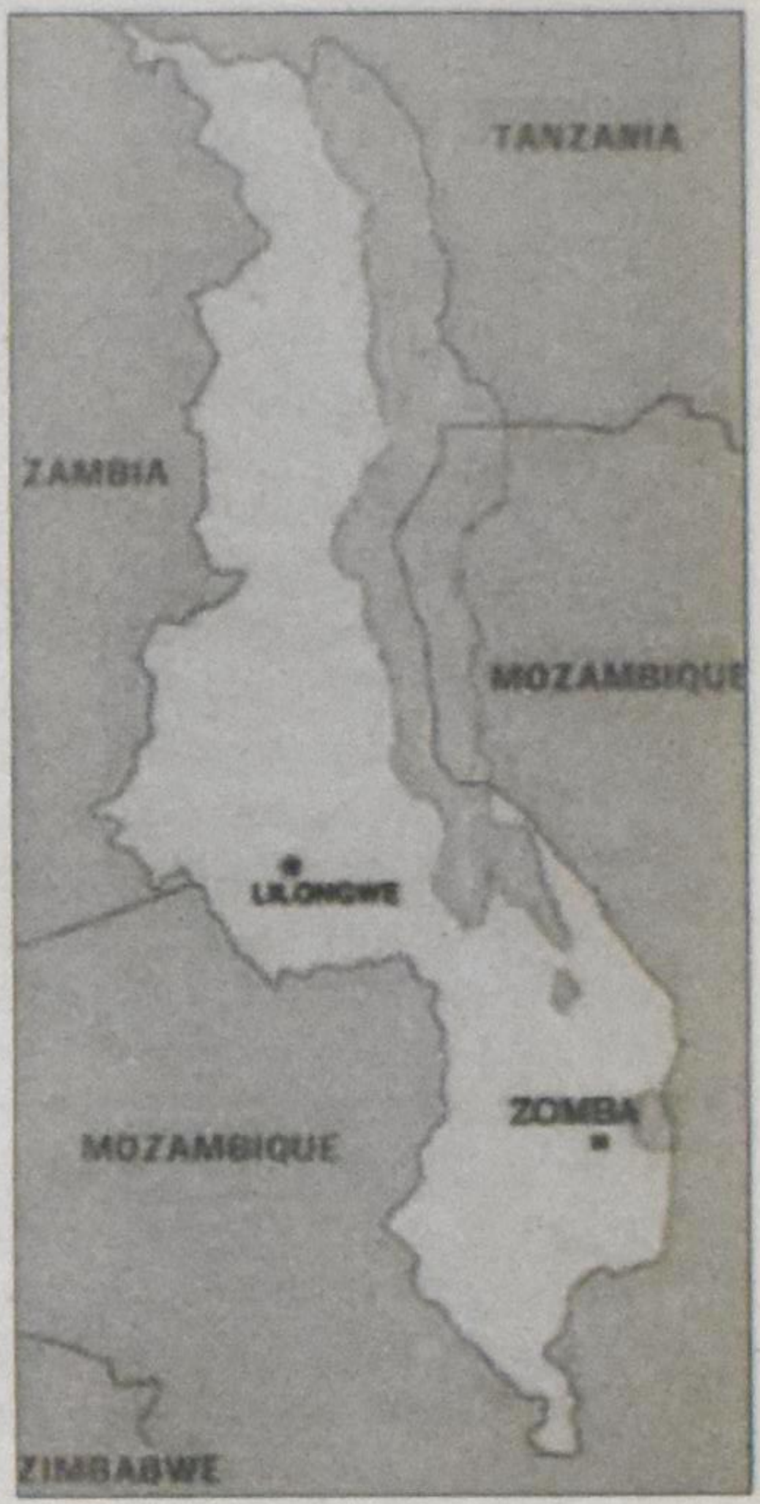
Bishop Athenagoras of the Greek Orthodox Church commented, "A small country like Belgium should not be split up. That would give a bad signal now that we are working for a united Europe in which we have to learn to live with differences."

Lack of funding forces Malawi theological college to close

Frank Jomo

Blantyre, Malawi (ENI) – Malawi's biggest theological college, and the only one training Presbyterian pastors in the central African country, has closed because churches have not paid their dues, the chairperson of the college board, the Rev. Maurice Munthali, has confirmed.

Faculty and students



"The school has closed even though we were supposed to graduate some students on October 5," Munthali was quoted as saying by the *The Daily Times*, about the Zomba Theological College, which is owned by the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian.

The CCAP synods of Blantyre, Livingstonia, Nkhoma in Malawi, Lusaka in Zambia and Harare in Zimbabwe are members of the college, which takes about 10 students from each synod a year.

However, said Munthali, "The college is owned by all member churches but the churches did not pay all their dues."

The college opened in 1977 and also trains ministers for the Churches of Christ, as well as Anglican and Methodist churches. It receives some funding from overseas.

Munthali said it was not known when the college would reopen. Only the Blantyre synod had paid its dues to the college. He added. "We are sorry that this has happened but then it is also not a guarantee that because we were a Christian school then things will be run smoothly."

The former general secretary of the Blantyre synod, the Rev. Daniel Gunya, had warned in June that the college would close unless churches started paying what they owed.

The Livingstonia synod had already stopped sending students to the college because it owed large amounts of money for fees. Its general secretary, Howard Matiya Nkhoma, told journalists recently his synod was seeking to reduce expenditure.

Several synods of the CCAP are members of the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) of which the CRC is also a member. The REC is in the process of merging with the World Association of Reformed Churches.

Islamic scholars seek 'common ground' with Christian leaders

Stephen Brown

Geneva (ENI) – More than 130 Muslim scholars have said in a letter to Christian leaders, including Pope Benedict XVI and the head of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Samuel Kobia, that world peace depends on cooperation between Christianity and Islam.

"Our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake," the 138 signatories state in the letter made public on October 11.

The letter is also addressed to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos I and other Orthodox church leaders, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and the leaders of world groupings of Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed Christians.

In a response to the letter, the Archbishop of Canterbury said, "The call to respect, peace and goodwill should now be taken up by Christians and Muslims at all levels and in all countries."

The Muslim letter compares passages in the Quran and the Bible, and identifies the principles of accepting only one god and living in peace with one's neighbours as common ground between the two religions.

"If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace," the Islamic scholars write. "With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants," they explain.

"Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders," the Muslim scholars add.

The publication of the letter coincides with Eid al-Fitr, the Muslim feast that ends Ramadan, the period of fasting during the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. The letter's publication also marks the first anniversary of another open letter from Muslim scholars to Pope Benedict. That missive was issued after the pontiff made a speech in Germany in which he quoted a Byzantine emperor who linked Islam and violence.

The latest letter states, "As Muslims, we say to Christians that we are not against them and that Islam is not against them – so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes."

Polish church suspends basilica building work

Jonathan Luxmoore

Warsaw,(ENI) – The Roman Catholic Church in Poland has officially suspended work on a 7500 square metre basilica intended to celebrate the pontificate of Pope John Paul II and the collapse of communism. "Our foundation has been forced for financial reasons to stop building," the church's Warsaw archdiocese said in a statement on September 21. "We count on popular goodwill for this project, which is already advanced, and trust this economically necessary suspension will prove brief."

Pope John Paul II blessed the foundation stone for the Divine Providence basilica in Warsaw's Wilanow suburb during a 1999 homecoming visit. In 2002, Poland's then Catholic leader, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, laid the stone. However, an international appeal has failed to raise the 250 million zloty (US$93 million) needed for the complex, which is intended to have a 64-metre (210-foot) copula and four approach roads.

Legal obstacles in 2006 blocked an allocation of 40 million zloty (US$15 million) by Polish lawmakers and government officials, while the country's constitutional court is now investigating a further parliamentary donation of 40 million zloty from Poland's state pension fund.

The new Catholic archbishop of Warsaw, Kazimierz Nycz, told the Catholic information agency KIA that his archdiocese was unable to fund the project by itself, and was seeking a "legal framework" for accepting state money. Public donations would also be encouraged through a "big promotional campaign", the archbishop said, while contracts to complete the building would be awarded by competitive tender.

In an interview last year, Cardinal Glemp rejected suggestions that the project had proved unpopular at a time of high poverty and unemployment in Poland. Plans for a church of Divine Providence began in the 18th century, when King Stanislaw II, Poland's last king, commissioned a church of this name as a token of thanks for Poland's 1791 constitution. However, the country's partition in 1792 by Russia, Prussia and Austria disrupted construction. The Second World War interrupted another attempt to build the church.

An Orthodox balm for Europe

Orthodox Christians can help rebuild East-West ties

Nicolai N. Petro

Kazan, Russia – For decades, many social scientists had pretty much two things to say about Eastern Orthodox Christianity: 1) that like all religions, it was disappearing with the advance of modern civilization; 2) that it derived most of its support from the reactionary tides of authoritarianism and nationalism.

Those pronouncements are being proved wrong. Today, as in the parable of the prodigal son, throughout Eastern Europe people are returning to the Orthodox Church in droves, and the effect in the public sphere, contrary to most expectations, is quite benign.

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II

Though historically viewed with suspicion by Catholic and Protestant Europe, Orthodox Christianity can actually help bridge the Russia-West gap.

At the heart of much of the miscommunication between Russia and Europe today lies the unacknowledged and untapped longing of Orthodox Christians to be recognized as part of a common European cultural family again. The latest effort to bridge this divide was Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II's remarks in France, where he spoke poignantly of how the Christian identity Europeans historically share should promote dialogue on issues like human rights and peace, even with atheists and members of other faiths.

The patriarch was pointing out that, while they may differ on specific political issues today, a profound religious bond actually underpins Western and Eastern European cultural and political values. Sadly, this common bond is rarely mentioned, in either Russia or the West. Today's Slavophile Russian nationalists seem uncomfortable recalling that, despite his uncompromising critique of Western secularism, their avatar Fyodor Dostoyevsky always regarded Europe as Russia's "mother" civilization.

In the West, this oversight has more to do with the fact that Catholic and Protestant Christianity have so often denied an equal voice to those who disagreed with them. In both instances, Orthodox Christianity is seen as part of the problem in East-West relations, instead of part of the solution, as it should be.

Western suspicion of Eastern Orthodoxy can be traced back to before the Great Schism that divided the Christian Church in 1054. One hundred and fifty years later, it fueled the Crusaders' zeal for the sacking of Constantinople. In the 18th century, it became a main theme of Edward Gibbon's influential interpretation of the Roman Empire, which was later echoed in the writings of Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. And in modern times, Samuel Huntington, among others, has warned direly of the potential for clashes between "Slavic-Orthodox" civilization and the Catholic-Protestant West.

With the exception of Greece, this sad legacy has made Western Europeans notoriously slow to accept countries with large Orthodox populations into pan-European institutions. In the current expansion eastward, however, it is inevitable that the values and mores of European institutions and alliances will be shaped more and more by the traditionalist views of Orthodox Christian believers and less and less by the modern, secularized Protestant assumptions of Western European democracies. Orthodox believers already far outnumber Protestants across Europe, and by some estimates they may eventually even surpass Roman Catholics. If 21st-century Europe ever develops a religious complexion, it will be predominantly Eastern Orthodox.

In the long run, therefore, while the greatest challenge to Europe's cultural and political identity may come from the growth of Islam, its more immediate challenge is how to deal with some 40 million to 140 million Orthodox Christians who, when given a voice in European policymaking, will argue that churches should have a more prominent voice than heretofore in the shaping of social policy.

There are two ways of dealing with this challenge.

One way is to stick to a narrow definition of "the West." Make modern-day secularism the gold standard of democracy and decry all challenges to secularism as examples of a "values gap" between East and West. This tried and true formula has the advantage of already being familiar, thanks to the cold war. Unfortunately, it is also a recipe for a conflict within European institutions. And, given the rapidly growing numbers, influence, and wealth of the Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe, it is a conflict Western Europeans are likely to lose.

Another way is to expand the definition of what is "Western" through dialogue with Orthodox Christians. The goal of such a dialogue would be to stress the common roots that bind various religious traditions, to encourage models of tolerance that do not presume secularism, and the different ways to balance the disparate roles of church and state, while avoiding total estrangement of one from the other.

Such a dialogue would allow Europe to build a new foundation for East-West relations that is based on the common Greco-Roman and Christian heritages. Most important, it would promote a greater understanding in the West of the Orthodox churches' de facto role as the largest nongovernmental organization in Eastern Europe. In this capacity, they inspire the philanthropy, social welfare, and civic activism that help establish a healthy civil society.

It's time to rethink old assumptions about Orthodox believers and to tap the enormous contributions that they can make to the creation of a peaceful and prosperous continent.

Christ the Saviour Church in Moscow rebuilt in the 1990s after it was destroyed by Stalin decades earlier.

Research looks at 'exotic' death rites in Netherlands

Andreas Havinga

Utrecht, The Netherlands (ENI) – Belief in God seems to be making way for a modern form of ancestor worship in the Netherlands, says a Dutch academic who has embarked on research into non-religious death rites.

"The priest and the pastor are increasingly sidelined, but the need for rites related to death remains. People are now negotiating with funeral companies about their own rites," Eric Venbrux said when he gave his September 21 inaugural lecture as professor of the anthropology of religion at Radboud University in Nijmegen.

"In how it deals with death, the Netherlands is one of the most exotic societies. Exotic in the sense that there is a great diversity of death rites," said Venbrux.

Many commentators say the Netherlands is one of the most secularised countries in western Europe.

Professor Venbrux told his audience that in the Netherlands there is now a trend away from rites of bereavement and toward death rites, where the emphasis is less on the grief of surviving relatives and more on the life of the deceased person.

This is expressed in many forms, he said, such as house altars or working the ashes of a deceased person into jewellery, ornaments or tattoos. In other cases, surviving relatives leave messages in bottles by gravesides, and bereaved parents put birthday presents at the grave of their children.

In his latest research, Venbrux, who has previously researched funeral rites in a Swiss Alpine village and among aboriginal people in Australia, aims to shed light on what a national study this year described as the "new religious complexity" of the Netherlands.

Venbrux is Radboud University's first professor in its faculty of religious studies, which is the university's newest faculty. It was inaugurated in 2006. The university itself dropped the description "Catholic" from its public name in 2004.

Web site (in English): www.ru.nl/rdr/

Church of Norway bishops split on homosexuals as clerics

Oivind Ostang

Oslo, (ENI) – Six of the 11 bishops of the (Lutheran) Church of Norway have supported proposals going before the denomination's general synod in November to allow people in same-sex registered partnerships to serve as bishops, priests, deacons or catechists.

The moderator of the Church of Norway bishops' conference, Bishop Olav Skjevesland of Agder and Telemark, and four other bishops have said that they are opposed to the proposal, which was discussed at a meeting of the bishops' conference in early October.

Current Church of Norway policy is that people in same-sex partnerships should not hold these consecrated offices.

All the bishops agreed that a decision by the general synod to allow homosexuals in registered partnerships would test the fellowship and unity of the church. "We will have to live together after this general synod, no matter which side has a majority," said Bishop Ole Christian Kvarme of Oslo, who opposed the proposal.

The church's national council has already decided to support the proposal. However, it said a bishop should still be able to refuse to ordain people in same-sex registered partnerships if the bishop believed it would be a violation of church teaching to do so. Several dioceses already have priests and deacons living in same-sex partnerships, as some bishops have chosen not to follow existing church policy.

Love song

The tender, tough mystery of (married) love

Inès Cécile Naudin ten Cate, engaged to be married, 1956

It is integral to the faith tradition of the historical Reformation to realize you don't just worship God in a church service. A believer can praise God at the birth of a child, rejoicing with the mother, father and midwife. A middle-aged child can receive strength when the faithful community surround you at the grave side of your parent and sing Psalm 23, 42 or 84.

When you fall in love it is the time to sing a joyful song.

But what is a Christian supposed to do? To sing one of Schumann's *Liederkreis* like *Mondnacht* (May 1840) would be a bit much, you need to find a good pianist too, and it would not quite fit with our casual clothing. A Puccini or Mozart aria like Don Giovanni's serenade, *"Deh! Vieni alla finestra o mio tesoro"* (1787) sung under a balcony might be an unusual adventure, but most young women have other interests in a young man than whether he be a budding baritone or tenor, and don't usually appear on balconies today.

If a teenage girl is happy at a prospective beau, it would probably be a bit aggressive, even in our day, for her to sing him *"Let's give 'em something to talk about"* in a Bonnie Reitt voice (1990s). And so many "love songs" on the current pop charts, or like Leonard Cohen's old classic of *"Suzanne among the oranges"* (1966), are pregnant with hyped up sexual overtones. You really need a more circumspect approach, since courtship still best begins in friendship.

Of course, a fellow could always begin casually with Ina Lohr's simple melody in *The Greatest Song* (1963): Arise, beloved, my beautiful one, come wander away with me....

The pickings for love songs celebrating married love are fairly slim, as if romance wears out quite soon after the knot is tied. Fixing daily meals, cleaning diapers, snoring in bed, putting your kids through college if you are middle-class, are not so romantic. Sometimes it takes a birthday, or an anniversary, or the death of a spouse, to help you remember the enrichment unspoken married love can provide a single person.

Years ago in the Vancouver Art Museum (1981) my wife and I toured an exhibit of Renaissance musical instruments with an audio pack that played appropriate music of that period before each exhibit case – recorder, viol, sackbutt, cornett, crumhorn. We were enthralled.

And I have gradually come to think such happy, dance-like tunes – you sometimes hear them in a good Shakespeare production – have a pristine spirit of christian joy. Not church solemnity like a Palestrina motet. Not courtly frivolity like a troubadour lai. But simply jubilant artless melodic artistry that is gentle and exuberant.

So I have tried to capture the lilting, bell-like "Renaissance" quality of a countertenor or chaste sorprano voice in this tune names INÈS. I hear the song accompanied by an angel playing a lute. Quiet guitar would do, I suppose, but a banjo twang is not appropriate. A sure acappella voice or soft keyboard chords chiming in would do in a pinch. The text witnesses to the mystery of married love which can weather ups and downs, misunderstandings, sins of neglect and forgiveness, sadness, aging, and times of sweet nourishing peace.

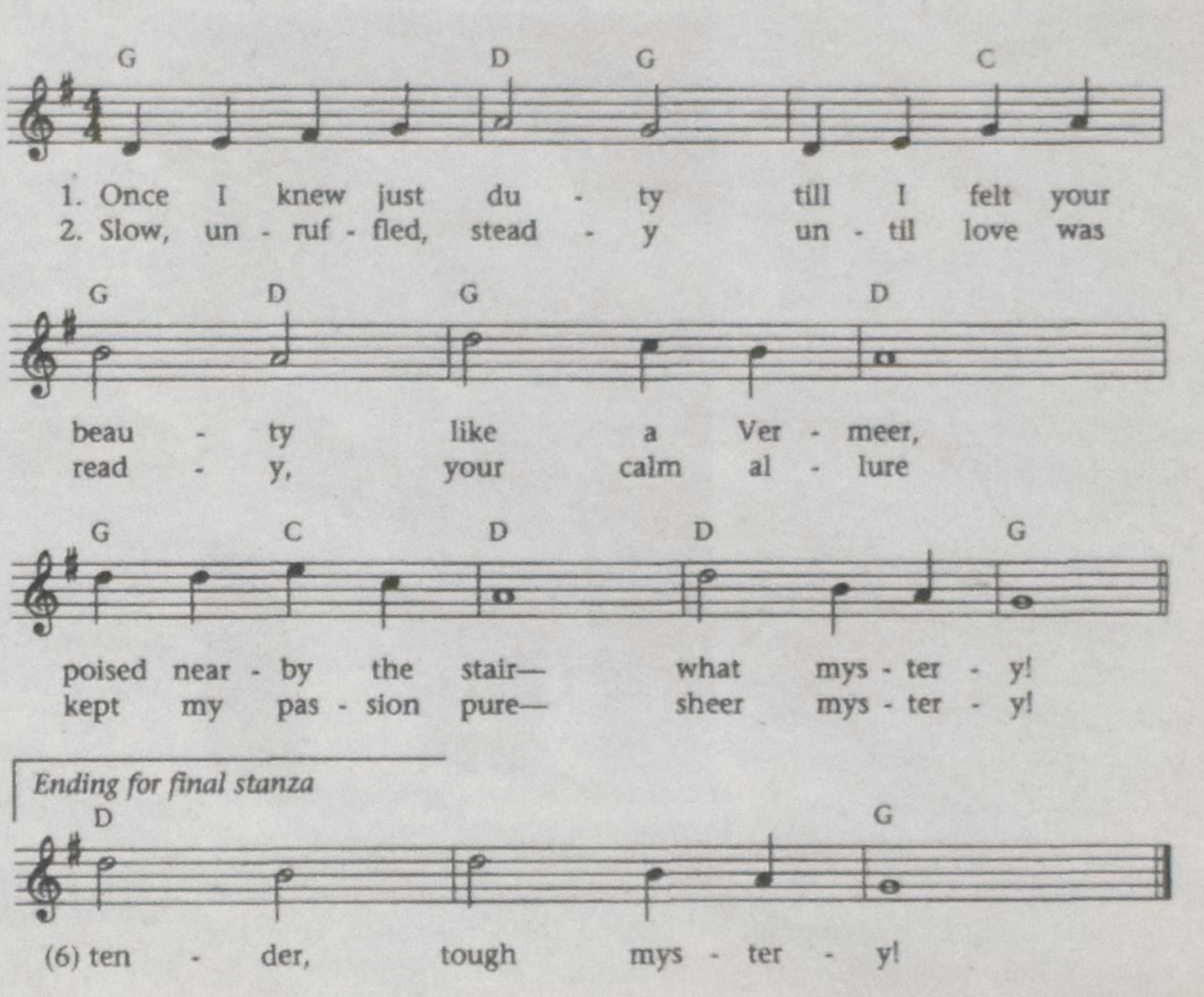
To know married love that lasts is a humbling experience, a very special gift of the LORD to some of us human creatures, and deserves a good song.

Calvin Seerveld,
Toronto
cgs80@primus.ca

Written for my wife after 51 years of married love.

Thanks to James Leach and Emmy Honig for musical research help.

The Tender, Tough Mystery of (Married) Love



3. Wedded love courts trouble:
fear and faults are double.
Yet simple grace
touched our long embrace—
strong mystery!

4. No caress can cover
all two lives shall suffer.
Shared joys and pains
permutate the strains—
fine mystery!

5. As our bodies altered,
when love's patience faltered,
your quiet peace
let respect increase—
strange mystery!

6. Married vows are brilliant
cues to be resilient:
helped us rehearse
"better and the worse"—
tender, tough mystery!

Aire for lute accompaniment or (unmiked) acappella voice

Text: Calvin Seerveld © 1998
Music: Calvin Seerveld © 1998

66 454
Inès

Vittore Carpaccio (1465-c.1526), Presentation of Jesus at the temple (detail)

The CRC family tree: 150 years and fading or fomenting?

Peter Schurman

September 13-15 marked the 150th Anniversary Conference of the CRC entitled "Assessing the Past, Facing the Future." The organizing committee wrote that "it is our hope that the conference will offer a place for scholars, pastors, laity, and denominational leaders to reflect on the major developments of the past fifty years as well as the denomination's future. Its purpose is to encourage ways for us to continue to serve as God's agents of renewal in the broader world."

What follows are selected highlights from the plenary talks with a few final comments.

This painting was commissioned in honor of the CRC's 150th anniversary in 2007. Titled "Grace Through Every Generation," the painting by Grand Rapids artist and retired Calvin College art professor Chris Stoffel Overvoorde depicts a host of figures from the church's history gathered around a communion table.

Reformed identity

First of all, our Reformed theological gifts were named and celebrated. Richard Mouw named CRC folks as "the Levites of evangelicalism." While eschewing the elitist connotations of this, he embraced its recognition of our distinctive contribution to North America: a passion for Christian education and scholarship. He said that "the Christian world in general would be greatly deprived if the CRC would cease... to have a leading role in inspiring and shaping the Christian intellectual quest."

Part of this means that we are "always reforming," but such renewal ought not to undue what we have been: "a unique tribe with a unique calling." Mouw warned us with a quote from Simon Chan: "In the modern world especially, the danger of a short memory far outweighs the danger of not being willing to change." We need to steward our identity as a Psalm 24:1 "Our World Belongs to God" Christian denomination.

Missional goals

Faithfulness can also be gauged by missional passion. This was not an overwhelming theme – in the form of evangelism or social justice – but notes were sounded by a few. Mouw reminded us that while the Lordship of Christ over all creation is vital, we must never "tip-toe around the cross." He encouraged us to follow our Lord to places of "suffering, grief, and devastation" and "to the places where unbelief, false teaching, and superstition have taken their toll on the human spirit." Dr. Bertha Mook (U. Ottawa) also emphasized that the traditional family has been eclipsed by a variety of family configurations, and the church ought to be open to touch and embrace these people and make a home for them in their pews. Likewise Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi (from Ghana and the General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) named global disparities, the need for long-term mission commitment, and even the need to address global warming through lifestyle changes. So there is much to do, and we have rich resources to contribute in God's mission.

Shifts in worship

John Witvliet lead a panel discussion on worship, explaining how the greatest change in 3500 years of worship is that lay persons often now lead Sunday mornings. We were encouraged to train this new staff, help them focus on connecting us with God first and foremost, and to manage change and conflict in a more healthy way. The new prof of Preaching at Calvin Seminary, Mary Hulst, reminded the audience of our tremendous need for the body to be fed by Word and sacrament, and she pleaded: "We need you to help us find good preachers!"

An uncertain future

The sense of urgency for the CRC, however, really found its voice in the offerings of Dordt prof Jim Schaap and church planter Timothy Blackmon. Schaap gave us a collage of words and pictures that flung us through 150 years of history and into options of the future. "Will there be a bicentennial?" he asked, as he catalogued the immense forces that threaten the modern animal we call "denomination." Technology, globalization, affluence, the supremacy of choice, geographic mobility, a sense of autonomy arising out of higher education, social fragmentation and simultaneous "melting pot" homogenization – all erode our denominational bonds. He further suggested that in an age enamored with spirituality "the CRC may not be particularly well suited." Congregationalism and regionalism turn churches inward, and "the withdrawal of Canadian CR churches from a weakened denomination seems not only plausible but inevitable." Finally, quoting Corwin Smidt et al in *Divided by a Common Heritage*: "popular evangelicalism is doing more to undermine the rich confessional legacy of Reformed Christianity than all of the so-called 'secularization' forces of modernity."

All is not lost, however. Schaap points to Marylinn Robinson's celebrated novel *Gilead*, our Christian colleges and agencies, and the theology that motivates them. He notes a sociological trend in which people are searching for deep and rich theological identities and he names the CRC as a viable "third way" in the evangelical/mainline culture wars. He concludes: "Will there be a CRC in 2057?" "Yes, but it won't be what it is today."

Spiritual vitality in question

Blackmon was definitely not lost on nostalgia. He boldly suggested the CRC has lost touch with the roots of the gospel. He described how H. Bavinck, in his time, was afraid the church would be lulled into sleep again. He quoted Bavinck: "It is as if we no longer know what sin and grace are, what guilt and forgiveness is, what new birth and conversion is. We know these things in theory, but we do not know them in the incredible amazing reality of daily life."

Blackmon suggested the same issue lies before us today. He asked if we have become lost in the narcissism, pragmatism, and unbridled restlessness theologian Ronald Rolheiser sees in broader culture. He then asked rhetorically if the gospel could break through our excessive self-preoccupation, our emulation of consumer culture, our unbelieving overconfidence in our own powers?

He ended with a quote from Martin Lloyd Jones: "We must cease to have so much confidence in ourselves, and in all our methods and organizations and in all our slickness. We have got to realize that we must be filled with God's Spirit... we must begin to plead and yearn for it."

Blackmon was beseeching us to pursue a passionate spirituality, which incidentally, is the CRC's lowest average score on New Church Development surveys. But is passion the only key to a future for our church? Is it passion understood as a deeper expressivism, or in the sense of its deeper Christian meaning – as suffering?

In a recent article on the Comment website entitled "MINE! Kuyper for a New Century" Richard Mouw nods to Al Wolters, who suggested that "a neocalvinism that is well equipped for our present situation must be under-girded by a deep spirituality that draws on various spiritual disciplines, including those, for example, from both Ignatian and Pentecostal resources." A passionate spirituality, claims Mouw, has always been part of the Reformed movement, and Kuyper's devotion book, *Near Unto God*, is no small example.

Diversity, youth, and denominational renewal

There were numerous workshops besides these plenary sessions; these focused on such things as gender, diversity, media and economics. This included a variety of speakers representing different movements within the CRC.

This conference was a dire necessity for our aging denomination, and the conversations were a great start to launch us into the next 50 years. We need to stop, reflect, and re-position ourselves from time to time – and not just through the formal government of Synod. This was the right time to open dialogue and share dreams.

One thing about conference attendance: numbers were fair but not full (at 200 people plus presenters), and the majority of the crowd represented more the old Dutch past than the more diverse future of the CRC. One Navajo CRC leader present said to me: "I don't feel they are talking about me in these sessions. I don't feel a part of this."

On a similar note, there were very few students or young adults milling about the conference. Their voice was not represented, and so their challenge to those who stand in places of power was absent. The CRC needs to intentionally invite young people to participate in our conferences, classes, and councils. An article in *Christianity Today* in September 2006 entitled "Young, Restless, Reformed" chronicled the thousands – literally thousands – of youth that flock to John Piper's "Passion" conferences – which are not just emotional highs but vibrant, theologically Reformed gatherings. This Reformed movement was deemed a larger and stronger movement than the popular and prolific "emerging church" crowd. But the only thing said about the CRC in this article was that it was too concerned with dotting its 'i's and crossing its 't's to warrant inclusion in a young and restless Christian crowd.

Perhaps that comment was a cheap shot. But we can take this outside critique seriously rather than simply be defensive. Our denomination is aging and bureaucratizing, and it may, like many other denominations today, be fading and dying. The fact is that denominations – and a larger vision for what God's church can be – can stagnate over time. They need to be re-owned, re-energized, and renewed – not with technique as much as by attending to God's Spirit, which often comes in the dreams of young people. We cannot rest on our Christian schools and colleges to disciple our young and reinvigorate our inheritance in faith, as rich an influence as they are. How do we faithfully nurture our deep, vital, "small but influential" denomination so it is embraced by the next generation?

Some say we can let it die. Let the institution die, and become a loose affiliation of churches. After all, what is important is not an institution, but the vision and mission of a Reformed-flavoured people of God engag-

Continued on p. 15

Afghanistan

Afghanistan's dusty hope

Andrew Faiz

I can't keep up with Sayed Ahmad. His compact wiry body is constantly on the move, driven to do something good in his beloved land. He has lived his 50-something years here in the province of Bamiyan, Afghanistan. He watched the Soviets enter in the early 80's, then the Mujahadin and then the Taliban. He watched two massive 1,500-year-old Buddhas bombed into oblivion by the Taliban; he watched friends, neighbours, relatives arrested and murdered; he has watched his own community, his people, slowly disintegrate through 30 years of war and then drought.

And so on this spring morning he walks with urgency across the seemingly endless sandstone landscape around Bamiyan. Ahmad is director of the Bamiyan branch of Centre for Cooperation in Afghanistan, which was an underground force during the Taliban years. The centre is sponsored by Church World Services, a Switzerland-based non-governmental agency, with offices in Islamabad and Kabul. Presbyterian World Service and Development works with CWS to provide food, shelter and economic development projects in both countries. We are following a pair of schoolteachers through many villages and back alleys, as they try to find students to attend their programming.

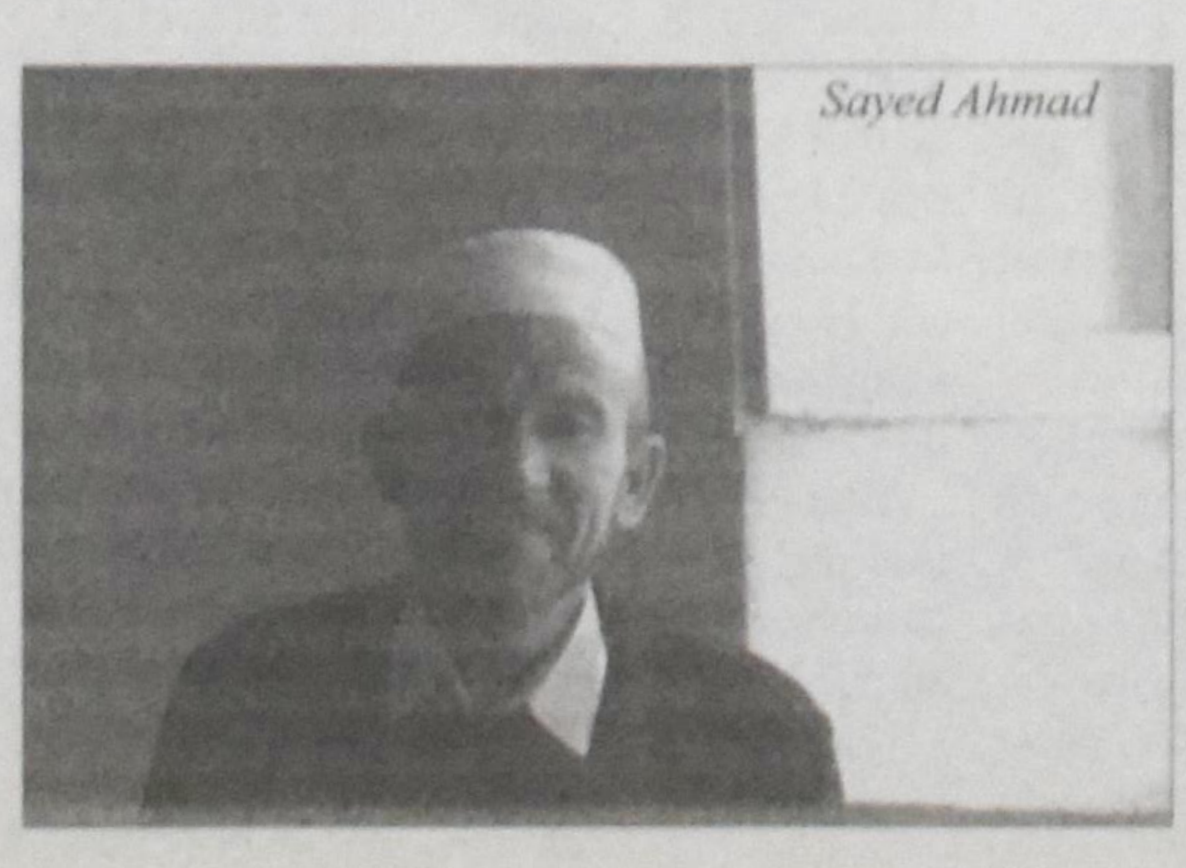
Several layers of Afghanistan, as seen from the Bamiyan airport: aid agencies, wishful tourism, satellite dishes, fallow fields and ancient caves which are still inhabited.

The teachers find children playing or working and follow them home where they get the parents to agree to send them for schooling. The parents invariably believe that education is a good idea, in theory, but not for their child, who is needed to do chores. And Ahmad is there, gently cajoling, supporting his teachers, never in the way, and yet never out of the picture.

"The story of Afghanistan today falls into three parts: before the Taliban, after the Taliban and during the Taliban," he had told me the previous day. "Before the Taliban were the Soviets and the Mujahadin. The Soviets caused a lot of damage. They bombarded schools, infrastructure, arrested the educated and skilled workers. After Russia, the Mujahadin also killed people, and by different names brought language discrimination, ethnic discrimination, they rocketed villages and there was lots of door-to-door fighting. Both Russia and the Mujahadin destroyed the economy. They destroyed the psychological system of the country.

"There was loss of hope, loss of relatives, loss of property and loss of hope for life."

Sayed Ahmad is driven to restore what was lost.



Sayed Ahmad

Life in Kabul

Kabul is a dustbowl surrounded by snow-capped mountains. It was once a jewel in the Hindu-Kush, a vacationing destination, a honeymoon spot. Today, you need steel binding in your spine to survive the roads. From the airport at the edge of the city to where I was staying in the middle of the city, there was one stretch of approximately 100 metres that was fully paved. The rest was horribly potholed, or just plain raw.

When Church World Services opened offices here in 2004 they had to bring all furnishings in from Pakistan – desks, chairs, computers, cabinets could not be found in Kabul. The city has grown some since then. I saw one car and one home appliance dealership. In the absence of hardwired phone service, cell phones and wireless are ubiquitous – you can buy cell phone cards on the street; along with foreign currency. Even from the remoteness of Bamiyan I was able to phone home everyday using a cheap cell phone.

There are public schools – not many and not well serviced, but they do exist, and are open to girls as well. Kids go to school in shifts because there aren't enough teachers, desks and rooms: public school in the morning; middle school in the late morning; and teens in the afternoon. I was told that tens of thousands of students had applied this year to Kabul university for only a few thousand seats.

There is a simple and basic lack of infrastructure. There are very few signs of a middle class, with that portion of the population replaced by foreign non-governmental agencies. Their vehicles – 4x4s, Land rovers – dominate the roads the way their agencies dominate the city. The most common symbol I saw was the blue "UN" on cars and buildings; followed by the red cross and the red crescent (the Muslim Red Cross). The American Agency for International Development has a large presence, as does the Aga Khan Foundation (a branch of which has built one of its signature Serena hotels in Kabul; basic rooms start at $200 US). My flight from Islamabad was filled with aid workers (and a dollop of diplomats). They are working as advisors to the struggling government of President Hamid Karzai; they are developing programs for women, for youths, for economic development, for food, for education.

This, however, creates a false economy servicing the aid community. There are some nice restaurants and pubs. I had dinner at a French restaurant, where I was served a potable glass of wine. For one purchase, I negotiated the price in American dollars and then paid in Pakistani rupees and local Afghanis. I could also have used yens, yuans or euros. But don't be fooled by this cosmopolitanism. This is a developing country, in the most basic definition. The town of Bamiyan looks like something out of the Wild West – dirt roads, wooden buildings, lean, hungry residents. Below the thin veneer of cell phones, SUVs and international currency is a people with needs and very few means.

"No one was safe"

Three decades ago Afghanistan was considered an enlightened and progressive Muslim nation. A benign young king, Mohammed Zahir Shah, introduced sweeping reforms in 1964. Within a decade the king's cousin had taken power and revoked the constitution. In another five years, he too was gone and replaced by the Communist party. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979, entering Kabul on Christmas Day. Their presence ushered in a geopolitical game: a curious union of bedfellows comprising the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Each with its own concern, financed and assisted rebels (Mujahadin) to fight the Soviets. Amongst the non-Afghans involved in this fighting, in his case for the preservation of an Islamic nation, was a wealthy businessman named Osama Bin Laden. He would go on to found an organization called al-Qaeda. The Soviets pulled out in 1989, and lost control of Afghanistan in 1992 to the Mujahadin, led by Ahmed Shah Massoud. (Massoud would later lead the fight against the rise of the Taliban and was assassinated on September 9, 2001. He is considered a hero and a martyr in Afghanistan.)

Ahmad wastes few words describing this period. "The Mujahadins, with Tajiks they destroyed houses of the Hazara; with Hazara they destroyed Tajiks. They made violence against other tribes. These painful events are out of my language to fully tell the story."

By 2000 the Taliban, a group of scholars and intellectuals who interpret Islam through a severe fundamentalism, had grown out of the southern province of Kandahar to rule most of the country. They saw education, ecumenism, interfaith relations and non-compliance as unacceptable to their allah. They were willing to punish, banish or kill anyone who crossed their self-defined lines. This included two silent but powerful 61-metre Buddhas that had been carved as part relief, part sculpture centuries earlier in the Bamiyan valley. The statues were deemed craven images of false gods. Once part of a great Buddhist empire that extended across the Indian subcontinent (millennia-old temples are still being excavated in northern Pakistan), Afghanistan has been a Muslim country for more than 800 years. It has a very long and honourable history of tolerance.

"No one was safe from the Taliban," says Ahmad. "They were killing everybody. People left their houses and their property. They left for the mountains, for Iran or Pakistan.

"The Taliban were mostly Kandahari but they were mostly foreigners – Chechans, Pakistani, Saudi, Chinese.

"One day the Taliban killed 300 people

Afghanistan

Bamiyan has mud huts with wooden supports and dirt roads.

over 11 hours. There was a 17-year-old getting married and the family pleaded for him. But the Taliban killed him in front of the family. He was the only son.

"The Buddhas were not even men," notes Ahmad. "They were only stone and they blasted them.

"There was so much killing there was no one left to bury the dead. Muslims use a white cloth for burial but there was no cloth left. The women would collect the dead. There was no one to pray over the bodies.

"And then there was the drought. There were no rains, no water. People would escape to the mountains with their animals and then the animals would die. They lost everything."

Ahmad was arrested once. Fifty people were left in one room for three days with only water. And then released. He escaped to another part of Bamiyan. "There was no hope. Bamiyan was dead."

School teachers talk to dad about his daughter going to school

Years of war

I met a family that had 11 graves on its compound; a very common story in Bamiyan. Go to a high place and look across endless kilometers of barren sandstone and you will see lots of makeshift flags – coloured bits of cloth tied to sticks. Each flag marks a grave, each grave that of somebody killed, most likely by the Taliban, but also by the Soviets or the Mujahadin. These are memory markers for a people who are very much connected to their families, their cultural heritage and their land.

In one conversation a group of men (it's always men, the women are hidden from view, certainly my view) recited an endless list of atrocities. I present them here not judging their veracity but as an expression of the psychological state of the people I met: In one day, they told me, 1,400 people were killed by Russians in Laghman province; in one day 10,000 Uzbeks, Hazara and Tajiks [three of the many ethnic groups in Afghanistan] were killed by the Taliban in the town of Mazar-i-Sharif; in Chomadi more than 1,000 were killed by the Taliban; also in Mazar-i-Sharif, 8,000 Taliban were killed by NATO forces during the collapse. (Since these oral testimonies did not come with dates it is hard to track them down. I tried, and found some evidence from an amnesty International inquiry and a CBC report that the stories, while exaggerated, do have some truth. I accept the numbers as respect for the dead, for the past.)

Those 11 flags on the compound keep that family whole, as uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers, cousins, grandparents coexist with the past, along with their cattle and their traditions, on a hundred square metres or so. They live in the same sort of houses they have for centuries – mud and straw, sun-baked, halfmetre-thick walls, cooled or heated with dung patties as needed, with a few small rooms where people eat, sleep, cook and chat. A few modern conveniences have crept in: cell phones, satellite television and spotty electricity. But these new currents don't affect the traditions.

Years without rain

And while the deaths accumulated during the Taliban years, the rains stopped in 14 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, including Bamiyan. Too busy dodging bullets, the locals didn't pay proper attention to the drought. They picked vegetation as needed, even though there was less of it each year. They inadvertently stripped bare all root systems, so even if there was a flash storm (for half an hour or so) nothing holds the water. Locals pointed to bare sandy hills and insisted they were once verdant. It was hard to believe; but turn your head in the opposite direction and there's a little bridge over sand. There must have been a creek there once.

The drought forced more people onto the refugee track, an endless stream of the desperate willing to live in cramped camps, in canvas tents, because, if nothing else, they get food. (It is estimated that over three million Afghans left the country for Pakistan and Iran.) And those who remained spend up to four hours a day walking to a diminishing river that runs through the Bamiyan valley. Every day, by foot or by donkey, filling cans to the brim, to feed, wash, cook for themselves and their boney, meatless cattle. The water-gathering task is often given to the children and women. Six- to 10-year-olds spend their day carrying water cans many times their weight.

And that is why the schoolteachers, funded through Ahmad's agency, are scouring the Bamiyan valley, looking for children to teach. And that is why they meet so much resistance – the children are integral to the economic viability of the struggling peasants. And that is why Sayed Ahmad is restless; he knows education is a powerful tool that will save his nation.

One of the teachers for the program is named Zahra; and when I first met her I told her I had a daughter with the same name. I proudly pulled out a photograph from my wallet, of a five-year-old girl in a sundress running carelessly through a front yard. Zahra, the teacher, stared at my child's picture for many minutes, passing it on to the other teachers, each staring at it as if this child were from another planet. I became uncomfortable waiting for them to return the photo. (Often when you share a child's photo with others they look at it for a few seconds, coo some appropriate words and pass it back.) A child like the one they were staring at did not exist in their world.

Small middle class

Abdul Wakil Shergul told me education has never been a priority in Afghanistan. I met him at the Bamiyan airport (a fancy name for a dirt strip and a few shacks). Like so many Afghans whom I met, he invited me to lunch. I met him at his offices at the united Nations High Commission for refugees where he has worked for two decades. over lunch – rice, meat, flat bread, fruit, cola and cigarettes – he told me his story. He is in his 50s. As a boy he taught himself his numbers and a few letters by looking at the family Koran. He wanted to get an education but his father was adamantly against it. A cousin sneaked him into the school and lied to cover Shergul's presence. Within a month the dad had stormed the school and pulled his son. The next year, the cousin did it again, bribing the teacher to hide Shergul when the dad came by. Finally Shergul's father relented.

Abdul Shergul is rare in his country: a member of the minority middle class. He remained in Afghanistan because, as he readily admits, he was lucky enough to work with the UN early on as a communications officer at the UNHCR. One of his sons had a similar position with Hamid Karzai's government, but has recently become an advisor. Shergul dreams of opening a school in his native village after he retires. And like many other Afghans I met, he has great sympathy with Karzai and the fledgling government. He believes in Karzai's sincerity and agrees steps have been taken in the right direction. But the rest of the cabinet is a collection of governors from the 34 provinces – ancient rivalries, petty politics, local concerns, hidden agendas, blatant jealousy and ambition overwhelm the national issues.

His recipe for Afghanistan is simple, and one that was repeated to me often by others: beat back the Taliban, stabilize the government, provide greater access to education, encourage investment and rebuild the infrastructure. His country desperately needs 25 years of peace to undo the past quarter century. And remarkably, despite what he has lived through, he is hopeful for the future.

Continued on p. 17

Ecclesiastes

What it's all about: reverence, obedience, expectation

Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.
For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden- thing,
whether it is good or evil.
Ecclesiastes 12:13,14

A. A. van Ruler

We human beings stand and act in a world that is unfathomable to us. There are astonishingly numbers of riddles, contradictions and questions that remain dark in creation. The whole of life sometimes looks to be in vain and to issue in nothing.

This is what our passage is referring to when it speaks of "all that has been heard." The Preacher has held back nothing to delve into these questions. He didn't avoid any of the riddles he encountered along the way. Whatever was puzzling to him he named as such openly and honestly. He didn't try to put some other spin on it. If there was no solution, he didn't pretend to have one.

That is the raw realism of the book of Ecclesiastes that speaks to us today. The writer is honest. He sees things as they are, and he tells it like it is. He doesn't try to prettify anything. Nor does he come to God's defense.

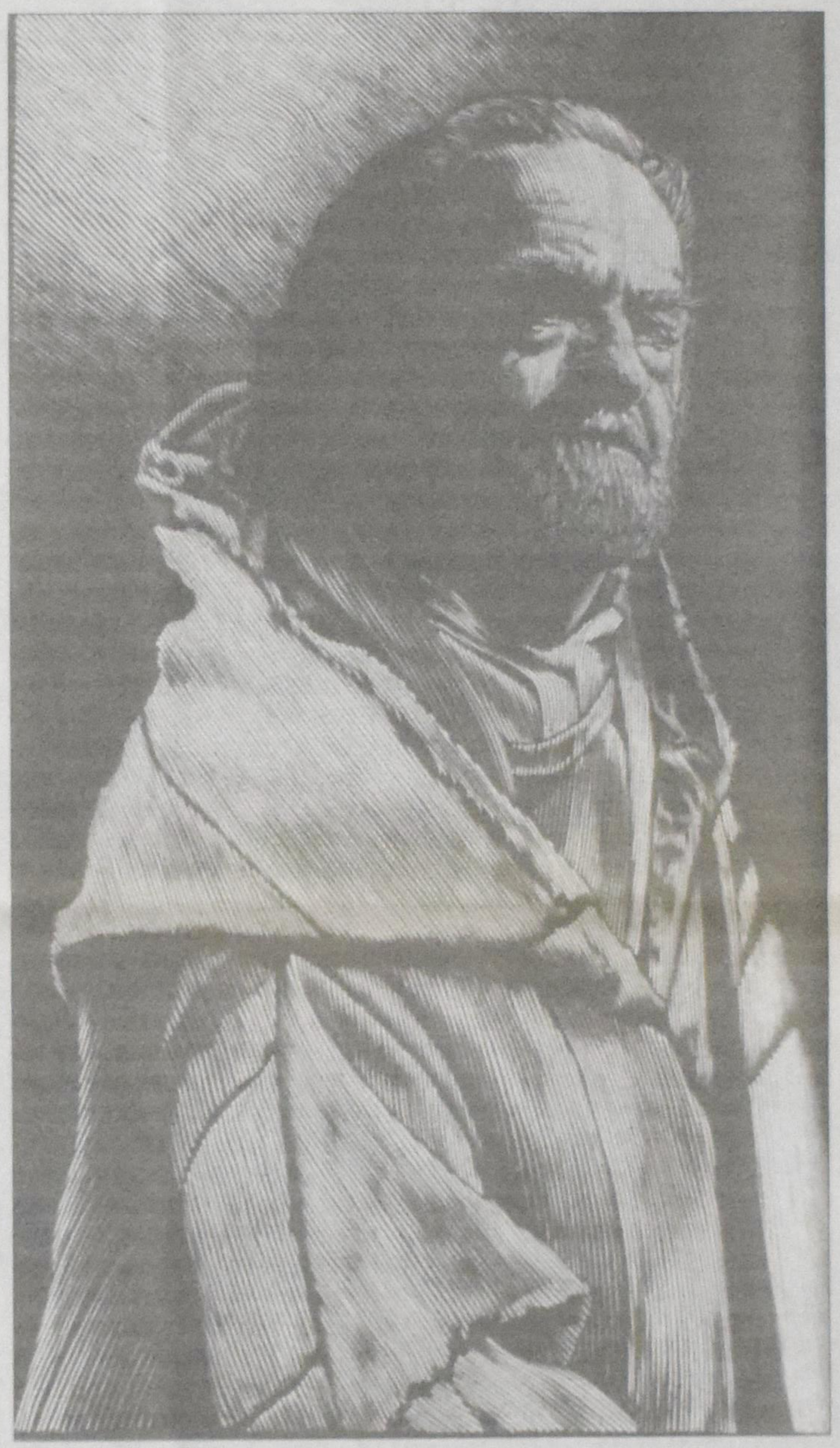
Does he, perhaps, act as God's accuser? No, he doesn't go quite that far, but he does enter many complaints over the many riddles in this world. However, he never forgets that this is God's world. Yet, he persists in saying again and again: I don't see it – I don't see how things add up. He never goes so far as to accuse God. Nor does he ever deny God's existence; in fact, he never even doubts it.

On the contrary, the fact that God exists and that he is God is as sure to him as the air he breathes, no matter how stormy his thoughts. He keeps coming back to it. It gives him his moorings.

At the same time it is precisely God's existence that is the source of his problems. If there were no God and if this world were not his creation, what reason would we have to seek for the goodness and wisdom in things and to complain of the absurdity of things when we see how futile and meaningless they are? God is the source of the problems. But he is also our mooring in the midst of these problems.

This is why the conclusion of all that we have read, its summing up and concentration must be: fear God. He lives in unapproachable light. He goes his own sovereign way. We, the world and life, in all their enigmatic ways, are his work. We must respect that. We must stand in awe of him. We must not seek to be god ourselves, but remember that we are his creatures. We cannot, therefore, hope to speak the final word, or to clear up the darkness and to unravel all the riddles. We must leave that to God. This is what is meant with the phrase "fear God". This does not mean that we should be afraid of him, but only that we must acknowledge him as Creator, ourselves as his creatures, and the world as his creation.

There's more to be said, of course. We must not only think. When we think we bump into all those riddles in which we must respect God. In our thinking we must revere God and produce godly fruits. But we must also act. When we are thinking about being, we must not forget that we are and that we are real and that part of our being real is to act. We are beings who act – in freedom and above all in responsibility. That's why the Preacher doesn't just say "fear God" but also "and keep his commandments."



The preacher of Ecclesiastes

There is a difference between good and evil. As acting beings, we must do the good and avoid evil. We, however, have no say-so over the distinction between good and evil. We do not have the power to define what is good or what is evil. The good is good in and of itself and the evil, evil in and of itself. They precede us. They are willed and ordained by God. He made the good good and evil evil. This why we had to be told what is good and what is evil in the Ten Commandments. We are to keep those commandments.

In this certain limits are set, as there was in the "fear God". We human beings do not determine for ourselves what is good and therefore what it is we ought to do. Just as we must acknowledge God, so we must also acknowledge the commandments, the norms and values. These are not changeable. There is something dumb and blind about them. Their mechanism is obedience, subjection, assent. Perhaps after a while we can begin to get some idea why the good is good and the evil evil, but we can never rebuild the edifice of the ethical from the ground up.

Meanwhile a great deal – perhaps everything – depends on keeping God's commandments – that they are kept by mankind and that in this way the good is done on earth. The humanity of mankind depends on it, as does the meaning of world history and the glory of God. In any case, for us they are the only lighthouse in the darkness of a world of dark riddles. They are the only way we can set our course on stormy seas.

This is true for all human beings, as our passage expressly says. No matter whether one is a Christian or not, a believer or not, a church-goer or not, the commandments are for human beings as such. No one can bail out. It is a fact that all human beings are created creatures. The only meaningful thing for man to do is to acknowledge this. To fear God and keep his commandments is no hobby for those who happen to be spiritual. It is simply the situation and position of human beings as such.

Is this all? Is this the only conclusion to be drawn from all the Preacher's reflections – that reality is a dark riddle, that we human beings must respect the Creator as creator and meanwhile attempt to make our way through the world by the narrow, stony path of good works? No, the Preacher adds something more. He raises his eyes above all theoretical reflection, above religious respect, above ethical limits to a great eschatological expectation: "God will bring every deed into judgment."

Everything that happens in this finite reality is of infinite importance. In the end everything will be brought to judgment. It will be turned inside out. God's final judgment extends to all that is hidden. It will be made public. It will be brought to light. What was good will be called good and what was evil evil. Then good and evil will finally be wholly separated and the whole riddle of the world will be solved.

God will be revealed to be all-knowing. And not just all-knowing but also just. Justice and righteousness shall triumph in reality. In between these, the gospel weaves something else. It tells us that God will not only be just but also merciful. He revealed himself as such in Jesus Christ. But this isn't the central thing: the central thing is the cutting through of the knot that is the riddle of the world and the silencing of the lament that everything is meaningless.

It is this eschatological expectation that is the heart and core of the entire Bible. There is something poetic about it, something lyrical. How would we human beings endure in life and in this world without this lyric? If this melody no longer sounds in our hearts, our hearts can only give in to despair.

The (lost) art of canning

Angela Bick

There's a long white house, verging on ramshackle, on the corner of two busy streets in Barrie. Vegetables are displayed on the side lawn, but at first it's hard to believe that it could be home-grown stuff, as the back yard is quite small. Every day since mid-June, piles of produce have sat under a slightly tattered white tarp and a little sign that says "Veggies – Ring for Service." It's a terribly inconvenient spot to sell anything – too far from the rest of the stores to catch any pedestrian shoppers, a world away from plazas and malls, and resolutely independent from even the Saturday Farmer's Market. Furthermore, since the table's on the side lot, there's no driveway for passing cars to use, and it's about ten feet from a set of lights on a four-lane road.

After speeding by all summer, I decided to stop there a few weeks ago. I pulled the car onto the curb as far as I could and jammed on my four-way flashers. After picking out some tomatoes and pressing the buzzer, I was a bit startled to see the medical accessories on the elderly woman who emerged from the house. It seemed like she had unhooked herself from an oxygen machine to answer the door, since transparent plastic tubing came out of her nose and then looped in coils around her arm. I paid, made awkward small talk, and fled. The tomatoes were delicious.

A few days later, I found an interesting recipe for hot red pepper jelly preserves. I'm a novice canner, dependant on the expertise of my mother and aunts. This was the first time I dared to can something alone. I collected jars at garage sales all summer, and inherited a massive canning pot. After buying lids and pectin and vinegar and sugar, I thought I was set. We had everything except the peppers. I knew – or thought I knew – of a farm about ten minutes north of town that sold vegetables in large quantities.

As I drove out there, Shelagh Rogers and two food cronies on CBC's "Sounds Like Canada" had a debate about whether or not the art of canning has been lost. The radio show's guests, both obsessed with organic, locally grown food, admitted that they didn't can anything themselves. I was out of the car, searching for peppers, and so I missed the conclusion of the show. The future of canning, however, didn't sound too bright. The farmer had no peppers, so I drove back into town. I thought of Oxygen Lady's little stand.

As it turned out, she not only grew three kinds of sweet pepper, she had all the hot peppers I needed too. This time, I noticed a line of clear glass jars marching across the back of her fresh-vegetable display: pickles, beans, jams, sauces. "Did you can all those yourself?" I asked, trying to mask my astonishment, failing as miserably as last week when I said "Did you grow all this yourself?" "Oh yes," she said, nonchalantly, to both questions. My few cherry-tomato plants in pots on the porch, and the seven measly jars of jelly that I will manage, painstakingly, to preserve later that night suddenly seem so pitiful. Her garden provides an income; she cans enough to sell the surplus. It's not a hobby or a trend, but her way of life. It made me a bit curious about the history of canning.

In 1795, Napoleon offered 12,000 francs to anyone who could prevent his army's provisions from spoiling. Fourteen years later Nicholas Appert of France discovered that sealed and sterilized bottles will preserve food. The strangest bit of trivia in this timeline is that although the tin can was invented a few years later, in 1818, the tin-can opener didn't come along until 1858. That same year, American John Mason introduced the glass jar as an affordable method of food preservation at home. Tinned milk, tobacco, tuna, juice, ham, motor oil, pop and beer became commercially available (in that order) over the next hundred years.

It's hard to gauge the place that home-canning has in our culture today. Although there is a *Canning and Preserving for Dummies*, you could be excused for wondering whether the title of Jeanne Lesem's *Easy, Modern Canning Methods* contains one oxymoron (or even two). Nonetheless, carefully placing a few rows of colourful mason jars on the pine shelf in our cool basement is one of the most satisfying autumn activities I know of. It's like I've taken bits of the summer and sealed them away, saving their scents and flavours for the early darkness of a mid-winter's day. Nothing that needs a can-opener can compete with that.

Finally, I returned to "Veggies – Ring for Service," this time with a different kind of exchange in mind. I introduced myself to Oxygen Lady. Her name is Betty. She said "thank-you" for the jar of red pepper jelly, but I got the distinct feeling that she was less impressed with it than I was. It was an anti-climactic exchange, if you consider the chaos in our kitchen as the climax – when it looked as though a giant pepper had exploded, or perhaps someone had just been very ineptly stabbed. There are probably less messy ways to can, but I don't know of any; one entire jar, for example, tipped its sticky contents onto a steaming stove element. We were picking hot pepper seeds out of our dishes for days.

I hope that canning is about to experience a revival. Maybe it's a trend, in my generation, which will re-emerge as a way of life, moving from hobby to habit. If *The Joy of Cooking* is any indication, we can take heart: its section on canning and preserving, removed in the 1990's, was added again in the latest edition.

If you preserve or can anything, you're probably an expert in that other fringe benefit of home-canning: the joy of giving away what you've made. You can thrill family members by handing out zucchini-relish in decorative pint jars at Christmas, but I dare you to approach someone you don't know – jar in hand. Here's a chance to dust off those canning jars in your garage and create the provisions that could help sustain a (spiritual) army.

Hot Pepper Marmalade

3-5 chili peppers (minced)
2 medium green peppers (minced)
2 medium red sweet peppers (minced)
1 cup white vinegar
2 cups sugar
Combine in a large saucepan.

1 package no-sugar-needed pectin
Gradually add, stirring until dissolved. Boil 1 minute. Skim off foam. Ladle into hot, sterile half-pint jars to within 1 cm of top, seal with sterilized lids, and process full jars in boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

Serving suggestion: spread cream cheese on crackers; top with jelly.

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CRC anniversary...*continued from p. 11*

ing the world as salt and light wherever they are planted. We do not want to live by fear of dying, of change, of risking it all. Institutions can be idols that we sacrifice our lives to while we miss the call of God's Spirit to a new place and task.

Maybe that's true. We are not our own. God calls us, as Bonhoeffer said, to come and die.

We can imagine things differently, however. Christendom is over, and the postmodern shift has disoriented the church. Christians no longer reign, and Christian tribalism seems counter-intuitive. We are not yet sure what the next chapter can be, and we are still trying to find our bearings. We can grieve lost privilege and diluted ethnic glue, but we can also creatively risk new possibilities for being more authentically God's alternative community of shalom.

We can see ourselves as "fomenting" – meaning "to nurse to life or activity; to cherish and promote by excitements; to encourage, promote growth, stir up, agitate." This takes listening, attending, testing, provoking. It takes patience or "long-suffering." Here's a question to pursue: how can we be salt and light – God's agents of renewal – in and for our post-Christian neighbourhoods? What if mainstream North America is now mission? Can we be distinctively Reformed in a culture that flattens everything out into homogeneous therapeutic superficiality?

Eugene Peterson said institutions can be like the dead bark of great trees that hold life and vitality within them. What is within the CRC institution is an extended family – extended in time and space – that holds and passes on a theological sap that proclaims as Gordon Spykman said "Nothing matters but the kingdom of God, and because of the kingdom of God, everything matters." The CRC carries in its veins a memory, an identity and a mission that is greater than any loose voluntary association can muster. God calls us to steward this gift, this family, this vision, and to sacrifice for it – not as an idol, but as an act of love and service to God. Being "Reformed" serves being "Christian" which in turn serves God's kingdom in this shifting world. And what that means needs to be re-interpreted for the next generation, like a new ring on a great family tree.

We need to nurture our congregations and agencies as a space in which people can see the dream of God's new society come alive with green. The seasons are changing. We cannot and will not stay the same. We can be expectant that strong, deep roots allow for flexible, young new branches – and fruit of many shapes and colours – beyond what we ask or yet imagine.

I recommend a handy booklet with all the plenary talks: *Grace Through Every Generation: Remembering, Rejoicing, Rededicating.* Darlene Meyering (secretary to Calvin College's President Byker) is selling them for $5 [meyrda@calvin.edu].

African inland mission

Mbudi Za Ndokotora

Rob Greidanus – October, 2007

Greetings from the long lost Ndokotora in Namibia! After a long absence, due largely to my computer crashing, I am back! There is much to report on the medical front here, so let me just give you some of the recent highlights and lowlights.

These last months have been marked by the bizarre, the miraculous, the discouraging, and just a few glimmers of hope. Let me start with the bizarre. A couple months ago, a young mother presented with what appeared to be uncomplicated labor. However, after several hours there was very little progress and strong evidence of obstructed labor. A malpresentation was suspected on examination and so she was brought to the operating room for caesarian section. To the surprise of everyone she was carrying twins. However, these were no ordinary twins. Instead they were conjoined (or Siamese) twins attached at the chest and abdomen. Unfortunately, the baby girls shared one heart, one liver and two lungs making their malformation incompatible with life. Sadly, they only lived some few minutes outside the womb.

On a more optimistic note, soon after this untoward death, I came across a truly miraculous life. I admitted a sick mother to hospital at 20 weeks gestation with a several week history of vomiting and diarrhea. She was lethargic, dehydrated and looked very ill. Her presentation and appearance made me clinically suspicious of HIV infection and so after re-hydrating her and admitting her to hospital I spent some time counseling her about an HIV test. She agreed to the investigation and the results subsequently confirmed my suspicion.

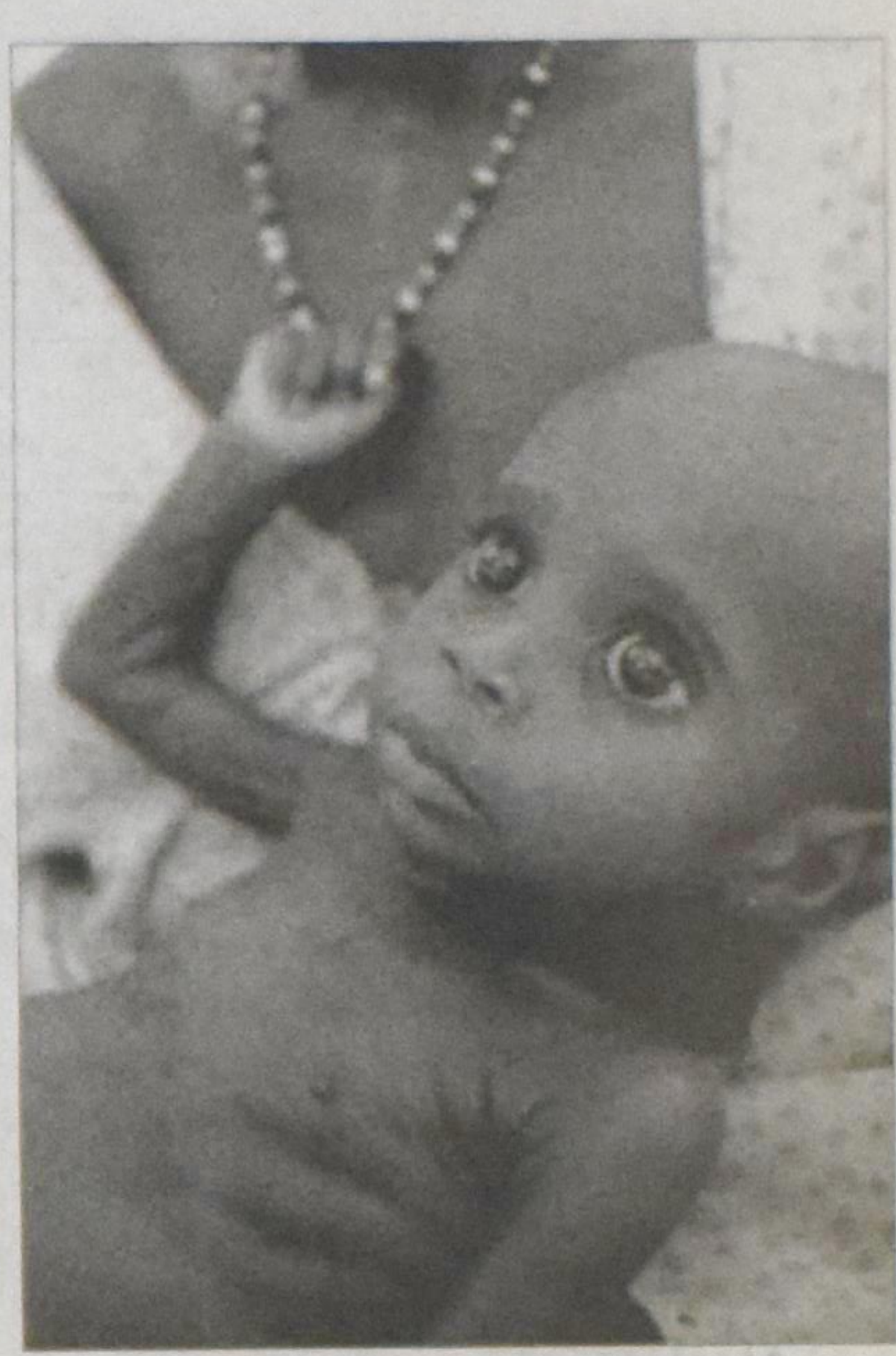
The next step was to assess her CD4 count and stage how advanced her infection was. I expected her CD4 to be low, but never as low as it soon proved to be. A normal CD4 count is above 500 and usually closer to 1000. The CD4 cell is a marker of immunity and the part of the immune system particularly targeted by the virus that causes AIDS. The lower the CD4 count, the lower the body's ability to fight off other infections. In Namibia, people infected with HIV are identified as having AIDS, low immunity to illness, and therefore eligible for Anti-retroviral medication (ARVs) when the count is less than 200. If it drops below 100 there is a very high risk of mortality from opportunistic infections.

Amazingly, this lady's count was only 2! I have never seen a CD4 so low and technically it is almost incompatible with life. To make matters even more remarkable, her potassium came back unbelievably low as well. Normally the potassium count is 3.5-5. Levels below 2.5 can be life threatening and muscle starts to lose its ability to function. At levels below 2.0 the heart muscle usually stops contracting and life ends from cardiac arrest. This pregnant mother with weeks of vomiting and diarrhea drove her potassium down to a value of 1.4! In disbelief I repeated both her CD4 and potassium tests but got back almost identical results.

How this woman was able to live with these two conditions that should have done her in is a great mystery to me. Even more exceptional is that she was walking around the hospital, and sustaining a healthy baby through it all. We have since aggressively replaced her potassium and started her on ARVs. A few weeks ago she was discharged home and follow up visits suggest that both she and the baby are hanging in there. I pray that she can go the distance and defy all the odds that would suggest otherwise.

Let me tell you a brief story which typifies some of the struggles that young women in Southern Africa face. Miriam is an intelligent 17-year-old girl living in poverty in the Rundu area. Both her parents are unemployed and so her family struggles with the means to survive. Looking for love and for someone to provide for her, Miriam entered into a relationship with an older man while in her mid teens. Just like many young women in Rundu, she became pregnant at age 16, while in grade 10. This forced her to leave school and abandon the education that may have helped her out of poverty.

Furthermore, she received more than just a pregnancy from this relationship. In addition to conceiving a child, she also acquired HIV infection. Soon after the diagnosis of pregnancy and HIV, the boyfriend suspiciously refused an HIV test himself and fled from his fatherly responsibility. Miriam was left alone with these two heavy burdens to carry. She brought baby Emily to term and loved her despite the challenges that unanticipated motherhood brought. To decrease the chance of passing HIV infection to her baby, Miriam was persuaded to stop breast feeding when Emily was just 4 months old. But what would she feed her baby now? She could not afford formula let alone cows milk. So Miriam did what many poor mothers do here – fed her baby Shikundu – an inexpensive milk of poor nutritional value made from corn meal.



It didn't take long for Emily to lose weight and become severely malnourished. She was in and out of hospital with diarrhea and other illnesses. I came in contact with Emily when she was 10 months old and Miriam brought her to my office for an HIV test. At that time she weighed only 4.5 kg (less than 10 lbs and less than two of my children weighed at birth!). She showed the typical features of severe malnutrition with thin, pale hair, a distended abdomen and profound muscle wasting. Thankfully, her HIV test came back negative but yet she was slowly starving to death. I had a long talk with Miriam and through tears she told me her story. She loved her baby, knew what kind of food she was supposed to feed her infant, but simply could not afford to buy it.

I come in contact with mothers and children like Miriam and Emily on a daily basis. The needs are so overwhelming that I often don't know where to begin to help them all. And yet, mysteriously, there are certain patients that I feel compelled to support in more tangible ways than others. If you asked me what it is that draws me to them, I would be hard pressed to give you an explanation. I would like to think it is the Holy Spirit that brings certain people along my path and pours an extra measure of compassion into my heart for them. Regardless, by God's grace, we as a family are doing what we can to support Miriam and Emily with nutritious food. At the present time, Emily's condition is still quite critical but she is starting to put on weight and becoming more alert and interactive. Please pray with me that she will make it through the critical months to come and not succumb to the malnutrition that is so common here. Our desire is to instill in both Miriam and Emily the love and hope that lies within us.

The operating theatre at the hospital

Now on to some cases that have really discouraged me lately (warning – the following is rated PG13). I have written before about the injustices against women and children that I witness in Namibia. It seems that this last month the depravity of man has stooped to a whole new level. Some days I find myself crying out like Habakkuk, "How long O Lord, must I call for help,... Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me...the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted."(Hab.1:2-4) What makes defending the cause of women and children here so frustrating is that the justice system (the Namibian police and women and child protection unit) don't take their job seriously. I am sometimes left wondering who they are protecting – the women and children or the men that commit the crimes?

The following cases are just a few examples of countless others I have been involved with over the last months. Recently I saw a 17-year-old mother that had a miscarriage at 7 months. The baby had multiple abnormalities. Only as we consoled her after her loss did she bring forward the story through tears of how this child was a result of her being raped by her older cousin. This was reported to the police but the case was not pursued. The very next day I did a gynecological exam at the request of the police on a 58-year-old lady that was raped by her nephew! The case was later dropped because of lack of evidence. This was due largely to the fact that throughout Namibia over the last 6 months there have been no 'rape kits' available (the standardized evidence collecting system approved by the courts).

Over the course of just a few days this last month I took both a 3- and 4-year old girl to the operating room to remove extensive genital warts under anesthetic. These too were the result of sexual abuse. I took the best evidence I could; including pictures, pathology samples, and plenty of detailed paper work, but the police have yet to convict a suspect.

Despondently, the mothers of these young girls seemed less than disturbed

Africa/Afghanistan

about the diagnosis. I am not sure whether this means they are covering something up or whether they are simply resigned to the fact that the system in Namibia will not bring them justice for this awful crime. I have met many women and even colleagues that are prepared to accept the fact that justice will not be served in this country. Men can literally get away with murder here and this is further verified by a policeman who recently shot and killed his wife in the Rundu area.

Fatigue and fatalism soon start to take over when faced with this injustice time and time again. It is especially discouraging when you pour your heart out into a case and try to do everything you can by collecting evidence, encouraging women to press charges, only to find out the case is dropped by the police for 'lack of evidence' (more accurately it is due to lack of passion and integrity in the justice system).

Last week I attended to a woman almost beaten to death by her husband who was a soldier stationed in a nearby military camp. I did an ultrasound examination which revealed a placental abruption (bleeding behind the placenta causing it to become partially detached and therefore threatening the life of her baby). Thankfully, the baby was still viable but its life was literally hanging by a thread. I spent a lot of time counseling the mother and encouraging her to press charges against her 'husband'. I warned her that most men who behave this way usually strike again and often the abuse becomes more severe with time. She eventually agreed to open a case against her husband and press charges. The next day, after talking with the police, she dropped the allegations largely because the 'woman protection officer' had no way of ensuring her safety while they went through their investigations and began questioning her husband.

What do you do when justice is perverted? What can you do as a stranger in a foreign land where evil is so tolerated? Many thoughts have gone through my mind over the last months. Sometimes, in anger and frustration I want to strike out and attempt to take justice into my own hands. However, I don't think that missionary and vigilante are compatible job descriptions (Samson may be one biblical exception). More often, I am tempted to give up the fight for justice and resign myself to the fatalism so prevalent here.

In fatigue and disappointment I sometimes feel that I cannot take another step in this spiritual battle. It is at those times that I need to remind myself of what I am and who God is. I am but a near-sighted clay vessel serving a Sovereign and Holy God. It is he who will eventually bring justice and make all things new and perfect. And if this doesn't happen in my lifetime, will I have the wisdom and faith of Habakkuk to trust in God's providence regardless of the circumstances? "...yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains." (Hab.3:18, 19)

So, as I size up those mountains of injustice that I face here, I crave the encouragement of Apostle Paul in Romans 16: "But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord. This makes me very happy. I want you to see clearly what is right and stay innocent of any wrong. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." (vs.19, 20 NLT)

Ndokotora Rob

Rob and Alisa Greidanus and family are serving in Rundu, Namibia with African Inland Missions (AIM).

Afghanistan *...continued from p. 13*

Building on hope

Hope is the one theme I returned to continuously, especially with Nejabat Khan Safi, the one person I spent the most amount of time with during my week in Afghanistan. He is Assistant Disaster Response Coordinator of Church World Service, Afghanistan. I spoke to him in Urdu and he spoke to me in English as both of us used each other to practice our language skills.

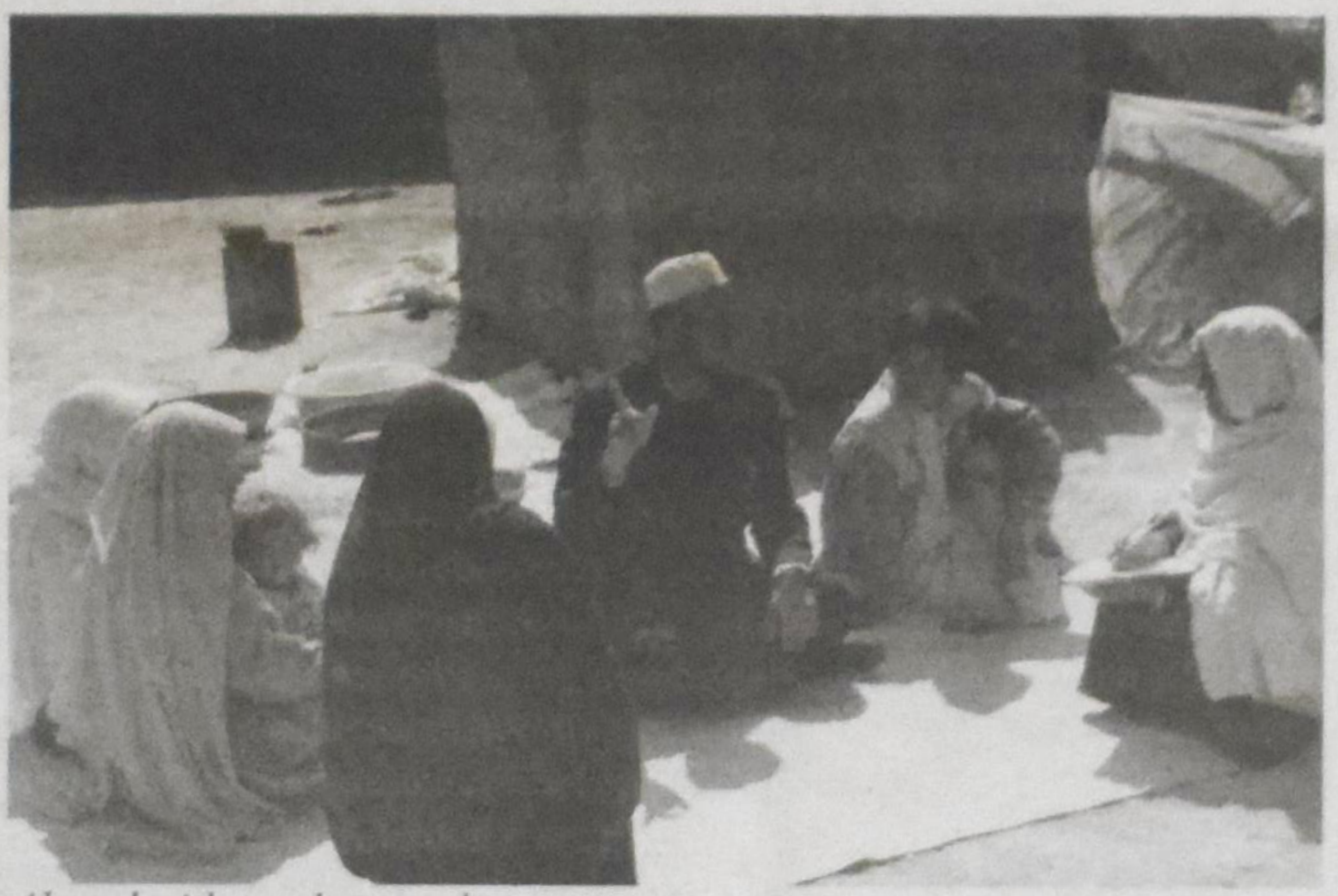
Safi is a proud Afghan, a devout Muslim and traditional in his outlook. He grew up in a neighbouring country, where he lived, studied and worked in an Afghan bubble. He is precisely the person that the UNHCR is hoping to attract back. Still, the struggles inside of Nejabat Khan Safi are the real struggles within his native country. And that was why for a week, in English and Urdu, we carefully parsed the word hope.

Safi was born in 1974, just at the beginning of the troubles. His father was a senior bureaucrat. When the Soviets arrived, the family was forced to flee. They began walking towards the Pakistani border. Along the way their father got very sick after drinking water from a fetid pond used by animals. The father begged the family to leave him behind to die. Safi, who was eight and the eldest of three kids, made the decision that they should all live or die together.

They settled finally in a refugee camp outside of Mansehra, Pakistan. Extended family lent them a tent, which was reclaimed a few months later. The family built a lean-to and lived there for a while. Finally an aid organization provided them with their own tent and Safi describes that as a proud day for the family.

He went to primary school in Mansehra, later moving to an Afghan boarding school in Peshawar, Pakistan, where he also attended an Afghan university. He got a degree in civil engineering, but there was no work available in that field. He returned to Mansehra and taught in a high school. He began working for aid agencies.

The buzzword in the NGO community is "capacity building," which means teaching the locals to build and run their infrastructure – government, civil service, army, police, schools, etc. Safi's "capacity" is well developed – he understands and promotes, through the various projects he administers, Western ideas of equity and access – but the issues he struggles with are not straightforward. He is married to a woman who cannot read or write, because his generation of Afghan women did not receive education. He has two "tween" sisters who are unschooled, because his father (like Shergul's, a generation earlier) does not believe that women should be educated. He would like to send his own son to school but is afraid for his safety because kidnappers assume any child going to school must come from a monied family. Horrific stories of kidnapped children are common on Afghan news.


Ahmed with teachers and parents

Safi teaches his wife to read and write, and does the same surreptitiously for his sisters. He also has a daughter for whom he wishes the brightest future. He is the sole breadwinner for his family, which in traditional Afghan fashion extends beyond the merely nuclear, including his siblings and parents. They are in Afghanistan because he got a job at a Christian-based aid agency.

He has incredible compassion and patience for traditions – our conversation was filled with discussion of Afghan customs. But it wasn't till we spoke as fathers that our conversation became darkly personal. By choice he has no ticket out of Afghanistan, but he would consider it for his children. When he hears stories of children in the West, like mine, he wonders if it wouldn't be better to leave, to begin again in a world not eviscerated by history. Nejabat Safi is torn between being an Afghan and a father. He sees his own life as a bridge to some future which he has not yet properly defined. He exists only to serve that future. And, in response I present the only effectual tool I have: my prayers that his children find the peace they deserve.

Months after my return I met a Canadian soldier, about half my age, who had done a tour of duty in Kandahar. We had seen different parts of Afghanistan and we compared notes. We agreed that Afghans were absolutely wonderful people – warm, giving, open. He told me he believed all they needed was a prolonged period of peace, so they could rebuild their country. He said he was eager to get back; that there was something he loved about that place, but he couldn't define it for me.

Our conversation took me back to Afghanistan and I was emotionally overwhelmed once more. I have never felt so helpless and hopeless as I did after my first day in Bamiyan. I had met people who had been beaten senseless by circumstance and there was nothing I could do to relieve their hunger or their pain immediately. While at the same time I saw the incremental hopefulness propelling Shergul, Safi and Ahmad. These three Muslims taught me a lot about hope and the power of faith.

That is where Afghanistan exists, between its crumbling infrastructure and its hope for a peaceful future. Some of that depends on the Taliban in Kandahar, which is where the fighting is. The presence is relatively small but it has a huge psychological weight in the country. The outcome of that fighting directs the nation, and Afghans look longingly to their government to lead the way. At the same time, they are practical people and they turn to aid agencies to fix the infrastructure.

Like that soldier I too have left a piece of myself in Afghanistan. And like him I struggle to define it. It wasn't merely pathos but, perhaps, its direct opposite: a palpable hopefulness. Or perhaps that sense of urgency, the physical immediacy which I saw Sayed Ahmad, Abdul Wakil Shergul and Nejabat Khan Safi wrap around themselves every morning.

Andrew Faiz is the managing editor of the Presbyterian Record. *This story first appeared in the October 2007 issue of the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church in Canada: www.presbyterianrecord.ca and is reprinted here by permission.*

Reflections

Welcome to my perch

Bert Witvoet

An unexpected gift

The last time my wife, Alice, and I visited our children out west (Calgary, Vernon, Vancouver), our daughter, Marguerite, gave me a hardcover booklet of 67 pages, and said, "Here, Dad, you might like to read this." She had apparently picked it up at a garage sale. I looked at the cover, which was black with a dark red rectangle on which was printed in gold: *On Bullshit* by Harry G. Frankfurt. The appearance of the book was very serious – classic, you might say. My Christian Encyclopedia has a similar look, except it is much larger and thicker.

In spite of the look, I thought she was handing me a humorous treatment of a rather vulgar topic. But I was mistaken. The booklet, it turned out, was written by a renowned moral philosopher emeritus at Princeton University, and constituted a serious philosophical treatise on the meaning of the word "bullshit." Harry Frankfurt has written other books that include *Necessity, Volition and Love* and *The Importance of What We Care About*. Princeton, by the way, is one of the most respected universities in the U.S.A.

So I was looking at a deep philosophical study of the concept known as "bullshit." The author begins by saying that "one of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit. Everyone knows this. Each of us contributes his share." But in spite of the copious amount of this "substance," very few people attempt to analyze the phenomenon.

Professor Frankfurt begins his inquiry by looking for a definition of bullshit. He finds a helpful start in a definition of *humbug* found in a book entitled *The Prevalence of Humbug* by Max Black. Black defines humbug as "the deceptive misrepresentation, short of lying, especially by pretentious word or deed, of somebody's own thoughts, feelings or attitudes." Quite a bit of that definition applies to *bullshit* says Frankfurt, except that "bullshit" is less polite and more intense in its expression. So Frankfurt agrees that "bullshit" is deceptive and misrepresents reality, but, he says, it is not quite the same as lying. In fact, a person who lies, knows what the truth is, but a person who bullshits does not necessarily know what the truth is.

Sloppy workmanship

I think I know what he means. Let me try to give an example. Suppose you were a student at a university, and you were writing an important exam. You have a question in front of you that asks you to explain how postmodernism manifests itself in the writings of Harry der Nederlanden. Now you have not read much material written by this renown editor of *Christian Courier*, but you know that if you admit to that, or write: "I haven't the foggiest idea," you may as well walk out of the exam room and throw the exam papers in the wastebasket. So you begin the process of bullshitting about the writings of Harry der Nederlanden. You are not lying about Harry's writings, because, frankly, you don't know what the truth is here. But you want to give the impression that you do know, so you pull together a few characteristics of postmodern thinking, and make the claim that many editors work with these ideas. You use pretentious words and expressions as you try to fill a whole page with all kinds of verbal nonsense. You are not lying so much as misrepresenting the reality. You have now reached the pinnacle of bullshitdom.

Frankfurt makes the point that producing bullshit is akin to doing sloppy workmanship. There is no meticulous attention paid to detail. The word *shit* does suggest this, he says. "Excrement is not designed or crafted at all; it is merely emitted, or dumped. It may have a more or less coherent shape, or it may not, but it is in any case certainly not *wrought*." But, says Frankfurt, there are times that the bullshitter does pay a lot of attention to detail. As example, he refers to advertising. Advertising is often sloppy with the truth as it makes one overstatement after another, and is, therefore, full of bullshit. But it would be a mistake to think that the realm of advertising and public relations is careless about its message. With the help of advanced market research, psychological testing and polling, sophisticated craftsmen try to get every word and image they produce right. Yet, there is a certain carelessness about the truth evident in these areas of public life: advertising, politics, public relations, image building.

No value

"There are similarities between "hot air" and "bullshit" says Frankfurt. Just as "hot air" when it refers to speech, has been emptied of all informative content, so excrement is matter from which everything nutritive has been removed. In order words, the person who produces bullshit is not giving you value for your money. Have you ever listened to a debate in a parliament, provincial or federal? Much of what passes for debate is unadulterated bullshit.

Frankfurt returns to the statement made in the beginning that there is a lot of bullshit in our culture by asking the question why? One reason is that there is so much communication of all kinds going on in our time that there is bound to be more bullshit than before. Another reason is that people in our society are often asked about things of which they are fairly ignorant. As democratic citizens of our country, we are expected to have opinions about everything. In addition, we have replaced the notion of correctness with the notion of sincerity. Rather than find out what the reality is like out there, we try to provide an honest representation of ourselves. Instead of being true to the facts, we are content to talk about being true to our own feelings. This, says Frankfurt, is elusive and insubstantial. In fact, he concludes that, in many instances, sincerity itself is bullshit.

Ignoring the truth

The essence of bullshit is not that it is false, but that it is phony, says the author. He concludes that someone who lies and somebody who tells the truth are playing on opposite sides, so to speak, but, and this is important, *they are in the same game*. Both know what the truth is. The bullshitter, on the other hand ignores the game altogether. "He does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does, and oppose himself to it. He pays no attention to it at all. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are."

Wow! Quite a statement. And it's a statement that rings true for me. During the recent Ontario election I could not believe what Dalton McGuinty was saying about independent schools. Here is a man who attended a separate school and who sent his kids to the separate school, and, yet, he described the non-public schools as being divisive. Was he lying? I don't think so. I think he believed his own propaganda. He became so careless about the truth that he focused solely on providing his campaign with a winning formula. He turned himself into the champion of the public school. He ignored the authority of the truth regarding independent schools and resorted to pure and plain bullshit.

It's everywhere!

But let's not forget that even the church is not free from verbal excrement. I know a preacher who is a gifted speaker and who captures his audience with fascinating but highly improbable tales. Not only that, all his stories are about himself and portray him as a wise and humble servant. I honestly believe that there is a lack of concern for the truth in his story telling, even though they cleverly illustrate the great truths of the gospel. I suppose I should follow the Apostle Paul's account in Philippians 1: 15-18, where he talks about two kinds of preachers, those who preach out of bad motives and those who preach out of goodwill. His conclusion? "What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

And so even bullshit can serve a good purpose. But I have a hard time rejoicing, because it often comes across as a wolf in sheep's clothing, and is, in fact, a formidable enemy of the truth.

Thank you, Marguerite, for this wonderful and highly moral dissertation on and exposé of a contemporary carelessness of the truth we faithfully may refer to as "bullshit."

Bert Witvoet is the former editor of CC, now retired, who stays active by editing the Christian Educators Journal *and preaching the occasional sermon.*

NETHERLANDS BAZAAR RAISES $122,000.00!

The Committee "Netherlands Bazaar" would like to take this opportunity to thank all contributors, volunteers and supporters of the 2007 Netherlands Bazaar.

The success of the Netherlands Bazaar is due to the dedication of the numerous volunteers, who worked so hard for many days and also the cooperation of the media. We are overwhelmed with the financial support and 'in kind' support of hundreds of businesses, corporations, organizations, and individuals, who have contributed so generously to this worthy cause.

Thank you to all those, who have created beautiful crafts since our last bazaar. These past months, and especially the day of the bazaar, have been a wonderful example of community participation.

This community spirit is what makes the Netherlands Bazaar such a special event, an event that many of us eagerly look forward to. It is an opportunity to work together for a great cause – namely to help people significantly less fortunate than ourselves. If you know of a family of Dutch descent in Ontario in real need, we would like to hear from you **before November 15**, in order that we may surprise them with a food parcel this holidayseason.

Please note that our registered charitable standing was granted on the condition that all recipient families are of Dutch extraction. Even with this restriction we are always hard-pressed to meet the needs of those who qualify. Each year we have to carefully select the needy who will receive support. For each recipient a questionnaire has to be completed and signed by the contact person.

Please forward all requests to the following address by November 15, and we will forward a questionnaire to you to be completed: Mrs. G. Spaans, Committee Netherlands Bazaar, 15 Pavillion St, Unionville ON L3R 1N8. The following committee members may also be notified by phone: Gé Spaans (905) 477-1243, Jannie Thomas (416) 498-8706, Anne Mol (905) 713-1323, Greta Niemeyer (416) 222-2087.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts because it is thanks to you that we have been able to raise the overwhelming amount of $122,000.00.

For the Committee,
Gé Spaans, President

Classifieds

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Redeemer University College
Monday, October 29

Registration begins at 9:30 with activities planned from 10:00 to 3:00
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Afternoon session: Musical Program

Guests will have an opportunity to meet with their grandchildren during the afternoon's coffee break.
Please call Magda Beukes at 905-648-2139 extension 4208 for more information and to register. Last date of registration will be **October 19, 07**.
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Classifieds

Anniversaries

Trenton 1957 October 26 Brighton 2007

It is with joy and thankfulness to God we celebrate the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents

Dick and Maria DeJong (nee **Dreise**)

We are grateful to God for his faithfulness, and pray that the Lord will bless and keep them in God's loving care.

Your children and 13 grandchildren:

Ted & Judy DeJong *Campbellford Ont.*
Marianne & Mark Visser *Chatham Ont.*
Dianne DeJong *Belleville Ont.*
David & Cathy DeJong *Shannonville Ont.*
Ken & Gillian DeJong *Orangeville Ont.*
Jennnifer & Mike Jones *Smithfield Ont.*

Home address: Dick & Maria DeJong, 471 Bullis Rd, Brighton ON K0K 1H0

God has richly blessed our parents and grandparents

Gerrit and Iefke Heersink

in their **50 years of marriage**.

Come and celebrate this anniversary with us by attending an **Open House** in their honour, to be held on Saturday, November 10 between 2 and 4 p.m.

Our father has also been a faithful minister in the Christian Reformed Church for 50 years. A **Service of Celebration** marking this anniversary will be held on Sunday, November 11 at 10 a.m.

Both events are to be held at Cephas CRC, 220 Goodfellow Road, Peterborough, ON.

Their children: Roland (Elizabeth), John, and Paul (Laura), their grandchildren: Joel (Claudia), Brittney (Ron), Bianca, Brianna, Maxwell, Samuel and Margaret and their great-grandchild Eric.

Address: 105-650 Parkhill Rd W, Peterborough ON K9J 6N6

1982 November 5 2007

Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. Psalm 63:3

25th Wedding Anniversary

Eric and Evelina (Hooghiem) Hartemink

and their children:
Karen & Steven Werkema, *Innisfail, AB*
Evelyn
Brenda
Cheryl
Deric

would like to invite you to celebrate with them at an **Open House** to be held on Saturday, November 3, 2007 from 7-9 p.m. in the Aylmer Christian Reformed Church, 194 South St. W, Aylmer ON N5H 1S3

Best wishes only, please.

Home address: 13994 Dorchester Rd, Belmont ON N0L 1B0

1957 November 16 2007
St. Catharines, ON Ancaster, ON

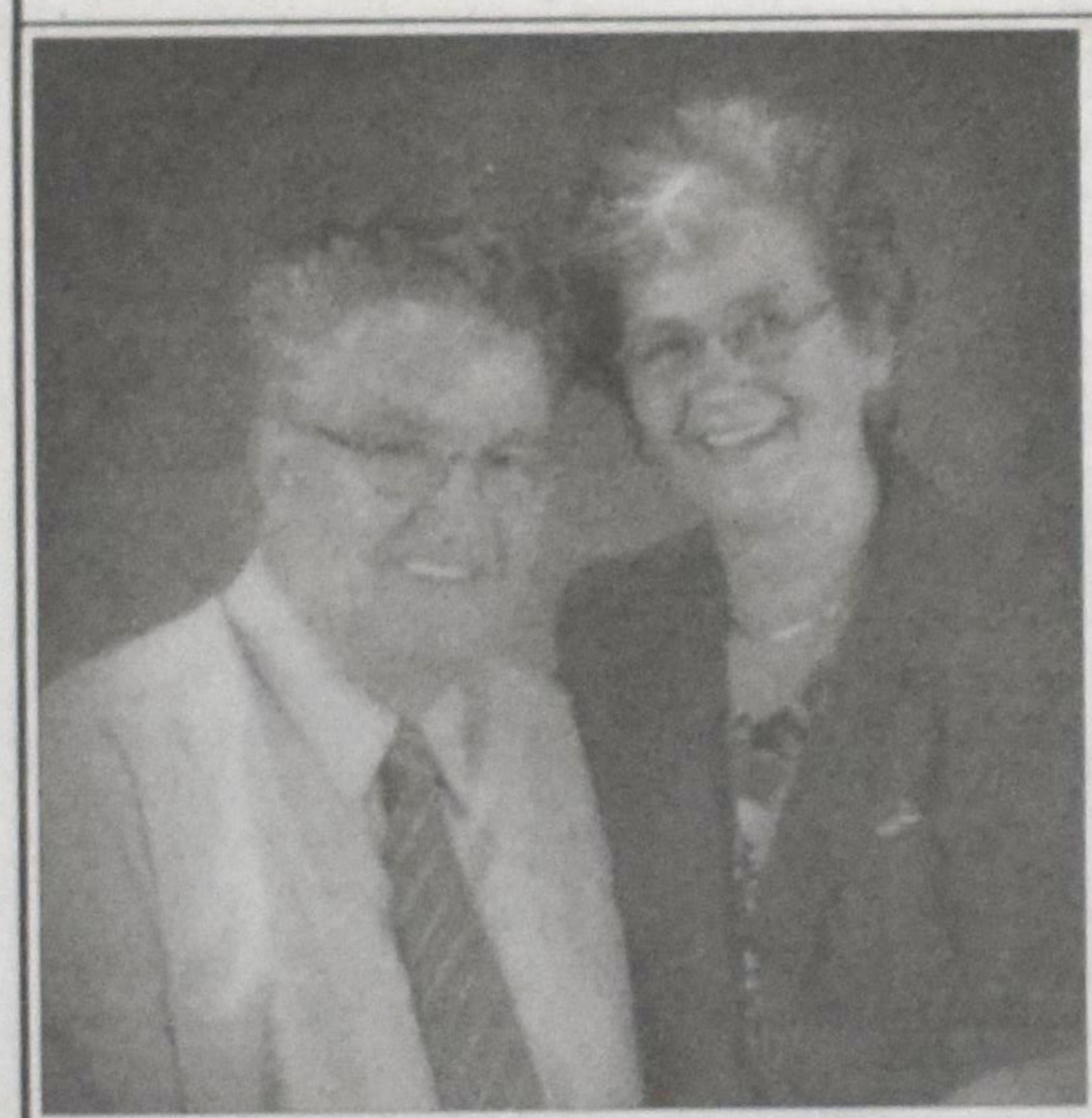
Congratulations to our parents & grandparents

Jake and Teresa Rumph (Van Minnen)

on their **50th Wedding Anniversary.**
We thank them for their love and support.
We pray that God will bless them and us with many more years together.

Debbie & Harold Knor, *Ancaster*
Brian & Leah Knor, Samuel & Ava
Karen & Fred Macey, Jasmine
Amy Knor & Greg Sommer (fiancée)
Wendy & Tim Boers
David & Nancy Rumph, *Ancaster*
Jessica
Jeremy
Edward Rumph & Sharron Ingram, *Cookstown*
Cynthia & John Veldhoen, *Belleville*

An **Open House** to celebrate this joyous occasion will be held on Saturday, November 17, 2007 from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. at their residence, 42 Milne Court, Ancaster ON L9G 4T3



Grijskerk – Visvliet, Groningen 1957 Red Deer, Alberta 2007

With joy and thankfulness to the Lord
We celebrate the **50th Anniversary** of our parents

Sid and Jenny Postma (VanSlooten)

With love from your children, grandchildren & great-grandchildren
Shirley & Willy Ypma, *Chilliwack, BC*
Kelli Anne (*Red Deer*), Gregory †, Kandice, Dustin
John & Janet Postma, *Red Deer, AB*
Alissa, Jamie-Lea, Paul-Edward, Sharlene
Anita & Allan Andersen, *Red Deer, AB*
Jeremy & Erin – Riley, Tyson, *Red Deer*
Jeff & Renate, *Edmonton*
Matthew, Mitchell, *Red Deer*
Mary Jane & George Buzak, *Edmonton, AB*
Ian, Jaclyn
Andrew & Linda Postma, *Camrose, AB*
Stuart, Stephanie, Janita, Frazer

Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him, and he will act. Psalm 37:5

Correspondence address: 3919 – 56 Ave, Red Deer AB T4R 4P4

60th Anniversary

Jo and Diny Brobbel

Love is meant to be shared with family and friends. Since many of you have been part of our parents lives in friendship and love, we invite you to join us in congratulating them at an

Open House D. V.

on Saturday, November 3, 2007 2 - 4 p.m. at Hebron Christian Reformed Church 4240 Anderson Street Whitby, Ontario

Lena, Adrian, Thea, Wilfred, Peter, John

Address: 905-100 Glenhill Dr S Whitby ON L1N 8R4

50th Wedding Anniversary
November 8th, 1957 - 2007

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Psalm 127:1a

With thanksgiving to our faithful Lord and Savior

Gerald and Wilma Samplonius

are grateful for the privilege of celebrating **50 Years of Marriage**. They would like you to join them on **November** 3rd, 2007 for an **Open House** at East Christian Reformed Church, 476 Metcalfe Street, Strathroy, Ontario, from **2:30 - 4:30 p.m.**

Joining in this celebration are their children,
Brenda & Dave Kumagai
Patricia & Eric Croeze
Evelyn Samplonius
William & Lena Samplonius
Christine & Gabriel Climent
Josephine & Marvin Kroesbergen
Andy & Sheilaugh Samplonius
along with twenty-two grandchildren.

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Obituaries

Psalm 23:6

Blij, Friesland
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Strathroy, Ontario
September 21, 2007

Herman Postma

After a long and faithful life committed to God and his family, Dad was taken home into glory at the age of 92.

Predeceased by his beloved wife, Tetje (Sept 22, 1998) after over 60 years of marriage also predeceased by his son Willem (1945).

Dad was the beloved father of
Ann & John deHaan
Alice Winters
Evelyn & John Kreeft
Lovingly remembered by 12 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren.

The funeral service was held on September 25 at Westmount CRC, Strathroy with Pastor Walter DeRuiter officiating.

Correspondence address: Evely Kreeft
1479 Blackwell Road, Sarnia ON N7S 5M5

Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Romans 8:39

On Sunday, September 23, 2007 at University Hospital, London, the Lord took home to be with him in Glory, his child

Sjoukje (Sharon) Feddema

at the age of 79.
Daughter of the late Rienk & Pietje Feddema
Beloved sister and sister-in-law of:
John† & Grace Feddema, *Lynden Washington*
Peter & Marge Feddema, *Kitchener ON*
Grace & Ipe VanderDeen, *Strathroy ON*
Jack† & Ann Feddema, *Strathroy ON*
Ann & Jelle Berg, *Guelph ON*
Jane & Ed Ryken, *Sherwood Park, AB*
Rienk & Anne Feddema, *London ON*

The funeral took place September 26, 2007 in Bethel CRC London ON.

Corresponding address:
Grace and Ipe VanderDeen
6 Ross Court Strathroy ON N7G 3W6

Carol Noreen Middel

of St. Thomas, and formerly of Essex and Tillsonburg, on Thursday, September 27, 2007. Our Lord in his infinite wisdom, mercy and love called her home at the St. Thomas-Elgin General Hospital, in her 69th year.

Dearly loved wife of John and loved mother of
Ronald & his wife Glenna Middel *of Chatham*,
Brenda & her husband Andy Haayema *of Aylmer*,
Christine & her husband Chris Bailey *of Tillsonburg*,
and Steven & his wife Vanda Middel *of St. Thomas*.
Dear sister of
Jim & his wife Donna Tapping *of Essex*,
Richard & his wife Brenda Tapping *of Essex*,
Linda & her husband Darl Tennant *of Chatham*,
Loanne Goosen and Marabelle & her husband Matthew McAllister *of Michigan*.
Predeceased by her brother Wilfred Tapping and her sister Kathy Ward.
Sadly missed by 12 grandchildren and a number of nieces and nephews.

Carol was born in Ruthven, on October 16, 1938, the daughter of Lois Tapping of Essex and the late Reginald Tapping. She was a member of First Reformed Church and the funeral service was held there on Tuesday. Remembrances may be made to Cancer research or the St. Thomas Community Christian School.
Romans 8:37-39

Personals

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Deadline for resumes: Nov. 1, 2007.

DUNDAS CALVIN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL
invites applications for the position of
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Due to the upcoming retirement of our administrator, Dundas Calvin Christian School is actively seeking applications for a full-time Principal commencing for the 2008-2009 school year. DCCS is a K-Grade 8 school in existence for over 45 years, with 200 students, and a staff of ten full-time teachers and office staff. DCCS is located in the Golden Horseshoe area of Ontario, and is supported by a strong and stable Christian community in Dundas, Flamborough, and Waterdown.

The mission of DCCS is to provide a Christ centred, quality education, develop the talents of God's children, and prepare them for Christian service. The Board of DCCS is looking for an administrator who will passionately lead the implementation of this mission.

We are seeking candidates with a sincere faith in Jesus Christ, who will use their existing Christian leadership skills to mentor staff and students. In addition, the candidate will envision and challenge the school to grow spiritually and academically, have the appropriate training and experience, and a commitment to the Reformed Christian worldview. The ideal candidate would have, or be working towards a CSPC.

An information package is available for interested applicants upon request. Interested candidates should send cover letter, resume (with references), statement of faith, and philosophy of Christian education to the contact information bel

This is a full time position, commencing August 1, 2008.

Application deadline is November 15, 2007.

James Schenk, Search Committee Chair
Dundas Calvin Christian School
542 Ofield Road North, RR2,
Dundas, Ontario, L9H 5E2.
or email: janetschenk@aol.com

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- Outgoing and positive personality
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For references and further information, please contact Karen Norris at **647-241-9307** or **email: knorris7@gmail.com**

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Dr. A. Guldemond, Executive Director
Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools
617 Garner Road, E.,
Ancaster ON L9G 3K9

Informal inquiries can be made to the Executive Director at adriang@oacs.org.

www.oacs.org

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Burns Lake – CFLD	9:15 am	1400
Osoyoos – CJOR	8:00 am	1490
Prince George – CIRX	7:00 am	94.3
Princeton – CHOR	8:00 am	1400
Smithers – CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Vernon – CJIB	9:30 pm	94
ALBERTA		
Brooks – CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
Edmonton – CJCA	6:00 pm	930
MANITOBA		
Winnipeg – CKJS	9:00 am	810
ONTARIO		
Atikokan – CFAK	9:30 am	1240
Chatham – CFCO	6:30 am	630
Hamilton – CHAM	7:30 am	820
London – CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound – CFOS	7:00 am	560
Sarnia – CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford – CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Wingham – CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock – CJFH	7:30 am	94.03
NEW BRUNSWICK		
Saint John – CHSJ	9:00 am	94.1
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND		
Charlottetown – CFCY	7:00 am	630
NOVA SCOTIA		
Digby – CKDY	6:00 am	1420
Halifax – CFDR	8:30 am	780
Liverpool – CKBW	7:30 am	94.5
Kentville – CKEN	8:30 am	1490
Middleton – CKAD	8:30 am	1350
Shelburne – CKBW	7:30 am	93.1
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Rocky Mtn.House CHBW 94.5 FM	Sun. 8:30 am
BRITISH COLUMBIA	
Prince Rupert CIAJ 100.7 FM	Sat. 10 am
MANITOBA	
Steinbach CHSM 1250 AM	Sun. 4 pm
NOVA SCOTIA	
Bridgewater CKBW 1000 AM	Sun. 5:30 am
ONTARIO	
Oshawa CKDO 1350 AM	Sat. 8 am
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Oct 28 Maranatha CRC in **Woodbridge**, Ontario, Canada will celebrate 40 years of God's grace and faithfulness at the 9.30 a.m. service. We invite all former members and friends to join us. For more info including RSVP's call the clerk Mr. Ron Rupke phone 905-851-7636 or email rrupke701@rogers.com

Oct 29 Heritage Day at Redeemer University College, **Ancaster.** Registration begins at 9:30 with activities planned from 10:00 to 3:00. Registration fee is $20.00 per person, including a roast beef buffet luncheon. For more information and to register, please call Magda Beukes at 905-648-2139 ext. 4208. Last date of registration will be October 19. For other details, see ad Oct 8 issue.

Nov 2-4 Marriage encounter weekend in **Kingston**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

Nov 10 Institute for Christian Studies 40th Anniversary dinner & silent Auction, Toronto. Information and registration at: www.icscanada.edu/events

Nov 23 Annual Dutch Christmas Hymn Sing at Holland Christian Homes, **Brampton**. See ad this issue for details.

Jan 27/08 Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. A special service to be held at 10 a.m. More events will be held in April.

Feb 15-17 Marriage encounter weekend in **Niagara Falls**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

April 19, 20 Maranatha CRC, **Cambridge** 50th anniversary. Celebrations and special events will be held on Saturday April 19 at 7 p.m. and Sunday April 20 during the 10 a.m. service.

May 2-4 Marriage encounter weekend in **London**, ON. For more information or to register on-line, go to **www.reformedme.org** or contact Chris & Cindy Otten at 519-393-5163 or by email at Ontario_Registration@reformedme.org.

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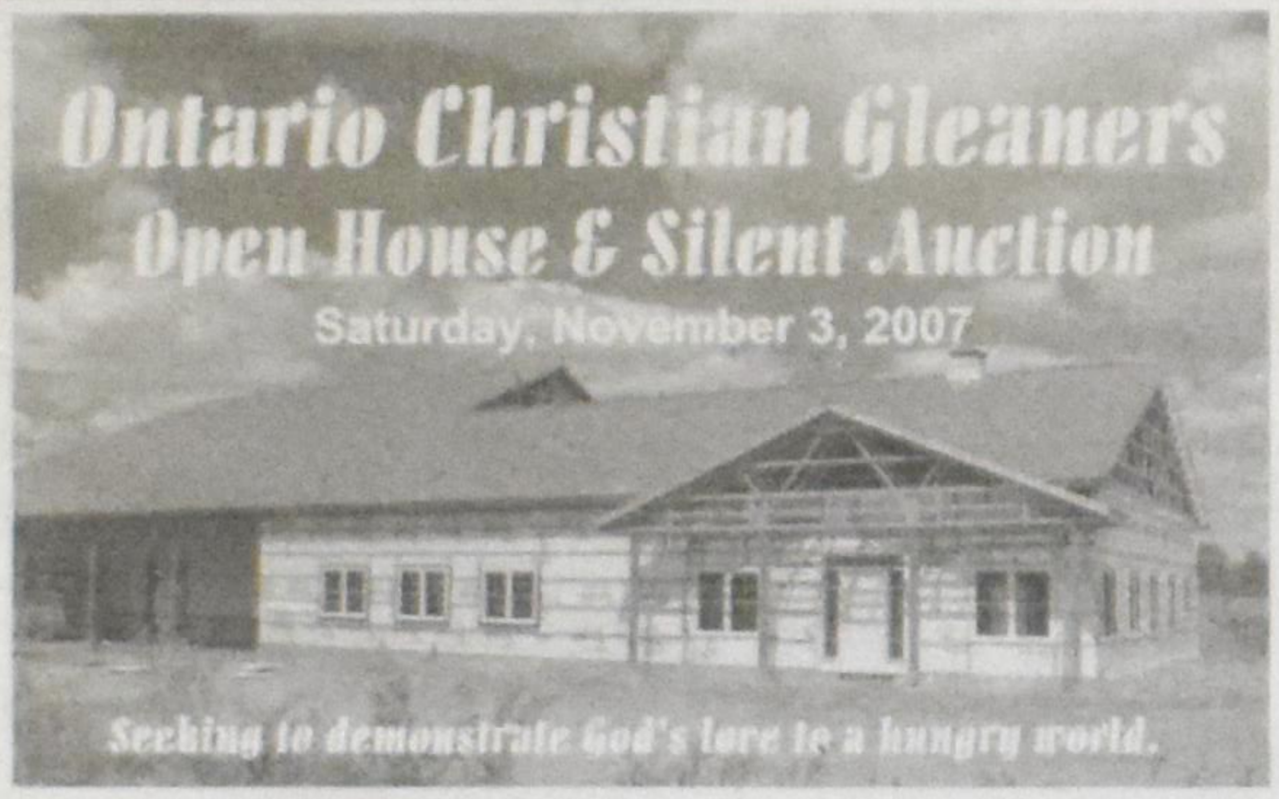

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Peace still a distant dream in Darfur

Chris Herlinger

Nyala, Sudan (ENI) – The killing in late September of 10 peacekeepers from the African Union in Sudan's volatile western region of Darfur is the most dramatic and publicised example of a steady decline in security during the last six months, and one that threatens humanitarian efforts championed by a wide spectrum of international faith-based groups and coalitions.

In an October 10 statement, the joint emergency operation of the global alliance Action by Churches Together (ACT) and Caritas Internationalis announced that it is temporarily relocating a number of international staff from Darfur to Khartoum in light of the insecurity in the region.

"This is a precautionary measure in line with standard procedures," said John Distefano, the director of the ACT/Caritas operation. The statement added that it was hoped to have the relocated staff return to Darfur later in October, should conditions allow.

Continued threats against humanitarian personnel are part of the worsening security situation. In September, an armed group in the western Darfur city of Zalingei detained for 30-hours several members of the ACT/Caritas team.

Recent interviews in Darfur with African and other humanitarian workers, officials of international agencies and those who have been displaced suggest that, even with talk of peace negotiations and planned deployment of a so-called "hybrid" force of United Nations and AU forces, the possibility of peace in Darfur remains a distant dream.

The AU killings appear to have confirmed fears that the deployments of peacekeepers should not be seen as a panacea, and that what is needed in Darfur is a comprehensive peace settlement. Such an arrangement would need to address long-term social and political problems in this impoverished and isolated region, which has a population of some 6.4 million and is about the size of France.

Without such a comprehensive settlement, said one United Nations official who did not want to be identified by name, "There will continue to be an increase in the numbers of those displaced."

According to UN reports, the rate of displacement has been on the increase recently, with 55,000 new people being uprooted between June and the end of August 2007. This brings the estimated number of those so far displaced in Darfur in 2007 to 250 000.

In all, the UN estimates that roughly a third of Darfur's population, some 2.2 million people, are now displaced, and a total of 4 million are dependent on some type of humanitarian assistance, whether food, shelter or other aid.

One theory says the rate of displacement has risen this year because there are now much larger numbers of armed groups in Darfur, and this has complicated a conflict that, until recently, had been ascribed to the Sudanese military and its allied "Janjaweed" militia fighting two rebel factions. There may be now as many as two dozen or more new groups fighting in Darfur, with political and ethnic factions splintering and with the groups trying to claim territorial control before any peace settlement is put into place.

Humanitarian workers affiliated with the ACT/Caritas operation in Darfur said in interviews that the overall situation remains confused. One worker noted that the uncertainty and continuing conflict might mean that the current "situation or something like it could still exist 10 years from now". ACT/Caritas staff have said that the work of their program and other humanitarian agencies continues to save lives and should be continued. Still, as one official put it, "Security is very fluid."

Chris Herlinger, a New York-based correspondent for Ecumenical News International, was recently on assignment in Darfur for the US humanitarian agency Church World Service.

News briefs

Kids need amplififyers in classroom

The Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists are urging that every classroom from kindergarten to grade 3 be equipped with speakers. "When we put speakers in a classroom . . . everybody shuts up and listens," said Andre Lafargue, a New Brunswick audiologist. Students hear poorly if they are more than 2.75 metres (8 ft.) away from the teacher. Another significant problem is that teachers' voices become strained trying to make themselves heard.

The audiologists say that classrooms are now noisier than ever with the buzz from lights and computers and interactive learning also creates more chatter among students.

So up the volume another notch. Get the kids used to more noise pollution. Once they're used to amplified teachers in the first three grades, the rest are sure to follow suit. By the time the kids reach high school every student will need personal earphones to hear the teacher.

Soon each student will also need his own microphone and sound system.

Of course, parents will have to keep up. Mom and dad will each have to walk around the house equipped with a megaphone. Up the decibels!

Rating your pain

Every time I see the doctor, a nurse asks me to rate the pain that I've been experiencing on a scale from 1 to 10. The first time I replied that I wasn't sure that I'd ever experienced a 10, so how would I know whether I were halfway there or not.

It turns out that nearly everyone has the same problem. A recent study suggests that patients tend to do poorly at rating their own pain on a scale of 1 to 10. Pain is subjective, so some people vastly overrate the amount of pain they are feeling while others are stoic and tend to shrug off even serious pain. Some are afraid that if they don't rate the pain sufficiently high, the doctor will ignore it.

But there are no objective ways as yet to measure pain, so pain researchers suggest that doctors ask more questions to get patients to compare pain over a period of time and under different circumstances.

The nurses never ask how much pain it causes patients to be forced to fill in the same questionnaires again and again at every stage and to see them tucked into folders where no one ever looks at them. When the doctor walks into the waiting room, the first thing he does is ask you all the questions you've already answered on the form.

Getting rid of pain

Research into pain goes on, and new treatments do evolve. The pain that comes from no source other than the nerves themselves has long baffled researchers. Neuropathic pain like that which comes from shingles and fibromyalgia seems to have no external cause.

An estimated one in 15 people suffer from neuropathic pain. The condition results from damage to or a dysfunction of the nervous system. In some cases, even the touch of clothing on involved skin triggers an unbearable burning pain. It is often perplexing and frustrating for patients and physicians, as it is difficult to diagnose and seems to respond poorly to standard pain therapies.

Origin BioMed Inc., a Halifax-based manufacturer has developed Neurogen, an over-the-counter topical drug product that was found to provide substantial relief in 85 per cent of patients suffering from shingles.

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Dr. David T. Koyzis
Professor of Political Science,
Redeemer University College

Authority and the Image of God

NOVEMBER 7, 2007

Chapel: *Living as Image-Bearers* 11:00 am - Auditorium
Afternoon Lecture: *What now? Taking Stock of the Provincial Election Results* 3:00 pm - EDR
Evening Lecture: *Can I? May I? The Reduction of Authority to Power* 7:00 pm - Room 213

For more information, please contact 905-648-2139 x4414 or mraddatz@redeemer.ca

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